Global Sanskrit Literature Series in English - 10

Mṛchchhakaṭika

(*The Toy Cart*)

By

King Śūdraka

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Mṛchchhakaṭika is one of the best dramas in ten acts composed by Śūdraka. He bypasses many conventional rules of dramaturgy and shows such unusual scenes as the nocturnal pursuit of a girl by lustful men, street-fights of gamblers, open quarrel and abuse between king's guards and between the contestants in a court of law, house-breaking and theft, sleep scene, murder and parade of the accused through city streets, and a scene of *sati*. Even the angle of love is different, because the heroine, a young woman and a young man goes to meet in pouring rain, thunder and darkness. The story is partly historical and partly invented, with no mythological ingredients.

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Tel.: 22587960, 22582703

Email: nksingh@mantraonline.com

Website: globalvisionpub.com

Mṛchchhakaṭika

2004

ISBN: 81-8220-030-X

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Rs. 210/-

PRINTED IN INDIA

Published by Dr. N.K. Singh for Global Vision Publishing House, Delhi-93 and *Printed at* Balaji Offset, Naveen Shahdara, Delhi-32.

PREFACE

Mṛchchhakaṭika as a drama is unique in a number of ways. In the range of classical Sanskrit drama, which generally revolves round the love-life of a king-hero, with its inevitable atmosphere of court intrigues and harem jealousies, the *prakarana* drama breathes a different and fresh air of social realism. Śūdraka bypasses many conventional rules of dramaturgy and shows such unusual scenes as the nocturnal pursuit of a girl by lustful men, street-fights of gamblers, open quarrel and abuse between king's guards and between the contestants in a court of law, house-breaking and theft, sleep scene, murder and parade of the accused through city streets, and a scene of *sati*. Even the angle of love is different, because the heroine is a young woman who pursues her young man and goes to meet him in pouring rain, thunder and darkness.

The story is partly historical and partly invented, with no mythological ingredients; it has ten Acts, not seven; only five of its characters speak elite Sanskrit, the rest use various vernaculars, such as Shauraseni, Avanti, Prachya, Magadhi, Sakari, Chandali, and Dakka; the horseplay exceeds

Bharatan limits; the idea of a courtesan as a heroine is already a departure from the tradition; Sansthanaka, described by Dr. Keith as the 'lisping villain', is in many ways a character out of Elizabethan or Restoration drama (his vices are egregious; he is coldly and cruelly malicious, and yet he is so frivolous as scarcely to excite our indignation); 'the minor characters among the twenty-seven in all who appear have each an individuality rare in Indian drama'; and the plot is given a class-conflict twist at the end that makes the play dearly beloved of left-wing drama enthusiasts. From farce to tragedy, from satire to pathos, runs the story— and the *santa rasa* tends to get lost on the way. Dr. Keith feels that

> "the real Indian character of the drama reveals itself in the demand for the conventional happy ending... If fate plays with men like buckets at the well, one rising as another falls, Shudraka is not inclined to seek realism sufficiently to permit of his introducing even a tinge of sorrow into the close of his drama."

Professor Jagirdar goes further and explains how *Mṛchchhakaṭika* continues the 'realistic' trend initiated by Kalidasa: the gamblers in Act II; the cartmen driving on crowded roads in Acts VI, VII, VIII; the thief breaking in Act IV; Sansthanaka and his courtier chasing Vasantasenā

on a dark road, and the quarrelling guards in Act VI. Unlike symbol, legend, and myth, this type of realism is quickly comprehensible because it is, in the superficial sense of the word, 'universal'.

Which means, of course, that appreciation of this play is more a matter of knowing the elementary stage conventions of Sanskrit drama than involving oneself in a world-view. The conventions are simple enough and neatly listed by the anonymous preface writer in the Neighbourhood Playhouse edition: "when a character must cover a considerable distance in going from place to place, he circles the stage several times before arriving; when pitch darkness cloaks the scene and the characters are invisible to one another, enough light is always left for the audience to see what is happening; the open space in the centre of the stage may be many places in rapid succession—street, a market place, a park; a low wall is considered too high to look over whenever that is desirable; many things which are handled and many passers-by are purely imaginary—the seeds which are scattered as an offering, flowers which are plucked, a wild animal in the bushes, piles of dead leaves in the park, the horse which the messenger mounts and rides away, squads of policemen, and always the crowds in the streets"; and the illusion of motion is

conveyed by appropriate handling of the reins. The presence of bullocks on an off-Broadway stage would necessarily present problems, and this was cleverly resolved by the directors of the 1924 production by getting each 'bullock' manipulated "by two boys within the hide — one as the forelegs, one as the hindlegs."

Mṛchchhakaṭika really needs no preface; it is modern in the most significant sense of the word — it is divorced from the pious and the religious. Therefore, it presents an interplay of manners and mannerisms in place of the miraculous play of life called *lila;* therefore it is enormously entertaining but only incidentally illuminating. [This drama has been translated by R.P. Oliver and edited by R.P. Shastri].

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INTRODUCTION

Mṛchchhakaṭika is one of the best dramas in ten Acts composed by Śūdraka with a social theme set in a realistic atmosphere. Technically it is a *prakarana natya* which requires a brahmin or merchant hero and kulastri or ganika as the heroine. Śūdraka's Chārudatta is a brahmin by birth and a merchant by profession. The heroine is Vasantasenā, a courtesan; but there is also a kulastri, the wife of Chārudatta, Arya Dhuta. As required in theory, Shudraka keeps them apart. Śūdraka also brings in the world of gamblers with appropriate characters and action, making the play a *samkirna* or mixed *prakarana*. The drama takes its name from a clay-cart (*mṛit-śakaṭika*) with which Chārudatta's son was playing.

Śūdraka paints his picture on a vast canvas and presents a complex plot. The principal theme is the love between Chārudatta and Vasantasenā. There are two sub-plots in the story: the love-affair of a brahmin youth Sharvilaka and Vasantasenā's maid Madanika, whom Sharvilaka is trying to buy off in order to marry her; the other sub-plot concerns a political revolution in Ujjayinī in which the rebels are attempting to overthrow the tyrant king Palaka and install

Gopaladaraka Āryaka on the throne. Despite the complicated plot-structure, the three threads are skillfully interwoven and the story is well-organised and unified.

Chārudatta and Vasantasenā had met in the Cupid's temple in the city during a festival. Vasantasenā fell in love with Chārudatta. But the fulfilment could neither be smooth nor straight. Vasantasenā was born to a courtesan, denied respectable social status, and her protestations of love, however sincere and noble, would always be suspect due to the stigma of her profession. Secondly, Chārudatta was a serious young man and was not likely to respond to love openly.

Besides, he had been reduced to poverty by his acts of generosity and public philanthropy and had nothing to offer to Vasantasenā except his name and renown. Chārudatta's poverty was, in a way, a blessing in disguise for Vasantasenā, though she had to fight hard to convince Chārudatta of her sincere love and winning her way to respectability against the social and religious code. But there was another complication. Shakara, the lowborn brother-in-law of king Palaka, was lusting for Vasantasenā. He was pursuing her relentlessly, and fortified by royal favour, his overtures of love carried a menace.

Vasantasenā gets an opportunity to visit Chārudatta when she seeks the shelter of his house to escape the pursuit of Shakara on a dark night. She leaves her ornaments with Chārudatta. Unfortunately, these ornaments are stolen by Sharvilaka who wanted money to buy the freedom of Vasantasenā's maid Madanika whom he wanted to marry. Madanika persuades Sharvilaka to return the ornaments to Vasantasenā posing as Chārudatta's messenger. Chārudatta on his part sends Maitreya to Vasantasenā with a precious jewel-necklace to replace the lost ornaments.

Vasantasenā seizes this opportunity to visit Chārudatta in a thundering storm and rain and spends the night in his house. The next morning she finds Chārudatta's little son Rohita crying because he has only a clay-cart while the neighbour's boy is playing with a golden cart. Vasantasenā takes the child in her lap and fills his toy cart with her ornaments. This incident, which has given the play its title, the little clay-cart (*mrid-shakatika*) filled with Vasantasenā's jewels, symbolises her acceptance in Chārudatta's household and is an augury of new life.

Chārudatta had fixed a rendezvous to meet Vasantasenā in the old garden on the outskirts of the city. Vasantasenā enters Shakara's cart by mistake. When she arrives in the old garden the frustrated Shakara strangles her, covers her body

with leaves and runs away fearing her to be dead. Āryaka mounts into Chārudatta's cart escaping from Palaka's prison and Chārudatta is unable to keep his appointment with Vasantasenā. The diabolical Shakara brings the charge of Vasantasenā's murder on Chārudatta. Circumstantial evidence of a woman's dead body in the old garden, discovery of Vasantasenā's ornaments with Maitreya and Chārudatta's refusal to reveal his movements in order to protect Āryaka, all goes against him and he is sentenced to death.

Luckily, Vasantasenā had only swooned away. A Buddhist monk, whom she had formerly helped to pay off his gambling debts and who was now living in a nearby monastery, sees her and helps her to recover. The timely arrival of Vasantasenā at the place of execution saves Chārudatta's life as also of his wife who was about to perform the act of sati. In the meantime, the political revolution succeeds. Sharvilaka kills Palaka; Āryaka is proclaimed the new king. Chārudatta pardons Shakara. Āryaka bestows the noble title of Kulavadhu on Vasantasenā. The near-tragedy turns into an occasion of rejoicing for all.

The first four Acts of the play are a reproduction with slight changes of Bhāsa's *Chārudatta* but in the *Mṛichchhakaṭika*, the love-story is combined with a political event in which Āryaka, the friend

of the hero, overthrows the ruling prince Pālaka. In the *Mṛichchhakaṭika*, the names are slightly changed: the king's brother-in-law is called Saṁsthānaka and the thief Śārvilaka.

Act I carries the action upto the deposit of the ornaments by Vasantasenā.

Act II relates Vasantasenā's generosity in releasing the shampooer from his creditors and who then turns a monk.

Act III describes Śārvilaka's success in stealing the jewels and the resolve of Chārudatta's wife to give her necklace to replace them.

In Act IV Śārvilaka gives the stolen jewels to Vasantasenā, who, pleased with him, gives him permission to marry her slave girl although she is aware of his theft. At this time, he learns that his friend Āryaka, who was imprisoned by the king, as according to a prophecy the former was to get the kingship, has escaped from captivity. Thus Śārvilaka leaves his newly-made bride with Vasantasenā in order to help his friend.

In Act V, a Vidūshaka comes with the necklace of Chārudatta's wife, which Vasantasenā accepts in order to use it as a pretext to see Chārudatta once more. Vasantasenā departs from her house and the storm forces her to spend the night in Chārudatta's house.

Act VI reveals her next morning offering to return the necklace of Chārudatta's wife but her gift is refused by Rohasena, Chārudatta's child, who complains that his clay toy-cart (*mṛit-śakaṭika*) be replaced by a golden one; Vasantasenā, moved to pity, sends her valuable jewels to replace his clay-cart. Vasantasenā is to rejoin Chārudatta in neighbouring park, the property of Saṁsthānaka, but by an error she enters the cart of Saṁsthānaka, instead that of Chārudatta. Āryaka, who has been seeking a hiding place, leaps into the cart of his friend, Chārudatta and is driven away. Two policemen stop the cart, and one recognises Āryaka and protects him from the other with whom he contrives a quarrel.

In Act VII, Chārudatta sees his cart driven up, discovers Āryaka, permits him to go off in it, and he himself leaves to find Vasantasenā.

In Act VIII, Saṁsthānaka in his park meets the shampooer-turned-monk washing his robe in the tank, insults him and beats him; then Vasantasenā arrives. Saṁsthānaka tries but fails to win her; he beats her apparently to death and buries her under the cover of leaves. The monk re-enters to dry his robe, finds Vasantasenā, restores her to life and takes over to the monastery to be cared for.

In Act IX, Saṁsthānaka as the Chief of Police accuses Chārudatta as the murderer of Vasantasenā; her mother is summoned as a witness but she defends Chārudatta. One of the two policemen, testifies to the escape of Āryaka, which implicates Chārudatta. Vidūshaka goes to return to Vasantasenā her jewels given to Chārudatta's child, visits the court but in his anger with Saṁsthānaka lets fall the jewels. The recovery of jewels along with the evidence that Vasantasenā spent the night with Chārudatta and left the next morning to meet him in the park, and the signs of struggle there deceive the judge who condemns Chārudatta to exile, but the king Pālaka at the instigation of Saṁsthānaka coverts the sentence into one of death.

Act X reveals the hero led to death in a procession; getting this news, the monk appears with Vasantasenā just in time to prevent Chārudatta's death. While the lovers rejoice at their re-union, the news is brought that Āryaka has slain Pālaka and succeeds to the throne; the new king grants a principality to Chārudatta and approves of his marriage with Vasantasenā. This enables Vasantasenā to free herself from her low position and to become Chārudatta's lawful wife. The crowd demands Saṁsthānaka's death but Chārudatta pardons him; the monk is rewarded by being appointed

as the chief of the Buddhist monasteries in the realm and the drama ends in happiness.

The play is full of incidents of varied interests which show the nobility of Chārudatta's mind and the selfless love of Vasantasenā; diverse characters are also depicted. The Vidūshaka, for instance, is keenly interested in delicious food, but his steadfastness to his friends in times of adversity and the warmth of his heart distinguish him from his fellow-characters in the Sanskrit drama. The drama gives a faithful picture of the everyday life of the people in those days and with its plebeian atmosphere, is regarded as the most Shakespearian of all Sanskrit plays. Wilson calls it in many respects the most humane of all the Sanskrit plays. The author's style is simple and effective; his many utterances are full of wisdom.

Śūdraka's characters are drawn from real life and show an amazing range of human nature. As Ryder has said:

> "Shakara's servant who jumps down from the terrace in his chains in order to give true evidence about the murder to save Chārudatta's life; Madanika who is prepared to sacrifice her freedom out of devotion and love for Vasantasenā; the executioners who apologise to Chārudatta before lifting their hatchet; the police officer who refuses to recognise personal factors

in the discharge of his duty; the gambler Darduraka who cheerfully displays his tattered garment full of holes, and is as ready to fight other people's disputes as jumps into the political revolution; the bohemian youth Sharvilaka who leads the revolution but finds time to break into a house to get the money to redeem his girl of bonded slavery; the silent but magnanimous Chārudatta who accepts the love of a courtesan and goes to the gallows to keep his promise to a political refugee; Vasantasenā who is struggling to throw away the bonds of her profession and meets her killer with the name of her lover on her lips; Dhuta typifying the pativrata; the blundering fool Maitreya who lashes at everything with his sharp tongue but who has the noble courage to precede Chārudatta's wife into the buring pyre; and the incomparable Shakara, crafty, cruel, wily as a fox, but downright laughable, a villain unmatched; the men and women in *Mṛchchhakaṭika* are truly 'citizens of the world'."

The vast canvas of the story is filled with a dazzling variety of happenings and emotions, presented with stark realism and with controlled art. The gamblers' world where a man is dragged like an animal across the road for avoiding to pay the debts, the atrocious murder of a young girl in a dilapidated garden, streets drenched in rain-water and mud, the crowds on a bazar day and traffic jam are some of the details which

reveal Śūdraka's perceptive skill, his range and grip of the realities of life.

Śūdraka stands alone in capturing the real spirit of a dignified comedy which laughs with abandon without descending to the level of a vulgar farce. His humour is not confined to the sallies of the Vidūshaka's conventional wit; Maitreya's observations are as penetrating and crammed with wisdom as they are funny. The mischievous remarks of the gamblers and their antics, Sharvilaka's humorous suggestion for dealing with Shakara, and above all Shakara's perversion of mythology and his fondness for using a string of synonyms in a single statement, his promise that he will not kill Vasantasenā again, all raise the level of fun in *Mṛchchhakaṭika* to an uncommon level of enjoyment. According to many Indian and foreign scholars, the play fairly reflects a 'society sufficiently advanced in civilisation to be luxurious and corrupt'. Some highlights of the contemporary culture are:

> "Ujjaini is known as a gay and prosperous city attracting people from all places including Pataliputra. Trade, both inland and maritime, was flourishing. The city could boast of rich merchants like Chārudatta donating large sums in charity, and of courtesans like Vasantasenā whose wealth and pomp would be the object of envy even for highly-placed people. The city was infested with gamblers and loafers who

fomented disturbance. Gambling was regulated under state control. The *Varṇāśramadharama* (the code of conduct prescribed by Hindu scriptures) was generally observed. Some laxity was there as in the case of Chārudatta who was a Brahmin by birth, but merchant by profession. Considerable attention seems to have been paid to music and other fine arts, which were cultivated by courtesans and men of refined taste. The brahmanical religion was prevalent along with Buddhism."

The *Mṛchchhakaṭika* as a whole is a drama redolent of Indian thought and life. It is truly relevant to all times.

About the Dramatist: King Śūdraka was one of the best Sanskrit dramatist and author of the famous play, *Mṛchchhakaṭika*. He was probably born in south India (Andhra Pradesh). He has remained so far, like King Vikramāditya, a mere legendary figure; the drama itself tells of him as a Brāhmaṇa, versed in many sciences and as one who died by self-immolation at the age of over a hundred years. He was known to be the author of at least half a dozen Sanskrit works, but nothing definite can be said either about his authorship or the date of the *Mṛchchhakaṭika*. It is even difficult to say whether the drama was composed before or after Kālidāsa, but the former view is more generally accepted. His date varying between the first century B.C. (H.H. Wilson), first century

A.D. (Monier-Williams), and the utter uncertainty of Keith ("We are left with no more than impressions, and these are quite insufficient to assign any date to the clever hand which … made one of the great plays of the Indian drama"). The historical events described in the *Mṛchchhakaṭika* belong to 485 B.C.

It is interesting to note that the *Chārudatta* by Bhāsa is identical in contents with the first four Acts of the *Mṛchchhakaṭika;* the supporters of Bhāsa's authorship of the Trivandrum plays advocate that Śūdraka composed six Acts in continuation of Bhāsa's *Chārudatta* (which is a fragment of four Acts), gave the name *Mṛchchhakaṭika* and claimed his authorship for the whole drama. Other scholars hold that had Śūdraka done this, his reputation should have suffered. They consider *Chārudatta* only an abridgement of the *Mṛchchhakaṭika.* Śūdraka is said to be the author of a one-Act play called *Padmaprābhṛitaka* which portrays the love of Devadattā and Mūladeva, a pastmaster in thieving. He is supposed by some scholars, to have written yet another play, entitled *Vīnā-vāsavadattā,* dealing with the Udayana legend.

Mṛchchhakaṭika

(The Toy Cart)

CHARACTERS

Maitreya	Servant (to Vasantasenā)
Chārudatta	Coachman
Radanika	Kumbhilaka, servant to Vasantasenā
Courtier	Courtier to Vasantasenā
Sansthanaka	Rohasena, Chārudatta's son
Servant	Sthavaraka, Sansthanaka's servant
Vasantasenā	Āryaka
Maid, to Vasantasenā	Viraka, captain of the guard
Madanika	Chandanaka, captain of the guard
Mathura	Clerk in Court of Justice
Gambler	Judge
Darduraka	Recorder
Karnapuraka	Vasantasenā's mother
Sharvilaka	Executioners
Chārudatta's Wife	

ACT I

The scene is a city street with Chārudatta's *house at the left of the stage. The two sides of the stage are alternately lighted and dimmed out as the action requires.* Maitreya *enters, carrying a cloak.*

Maitreya, (*reading*): "I am sorry, but I suggest you try some other Brahmin…." *He looks up*. What an awful mess you are in, Maitreya. There was a time—ah, those were the days!—when Chārudatta had money in his pockets, and I could go to his house and stuff myself with scented sweets. I could sit by that door and poke my finger into a thousand delicious cakes…shove these aside, touch those, and eat the others, like a painter dipping his fingers in his colours. If I wished, I could stand in a corner of the market, like a well-fed bull, chewing away without a care in the world. But now he is poor; poverty has fallen on Chārudatta! So I knock about from door to door, picking up whatever crumbs I can find, poor pet pigeon that I am. Just an odd-job man! Here I am, bringing a cloak for Chārudatta from his friend Jurnavriddha—a jasmine-scented cloak that he has been asked to wear after

he finishes his morning prayers. *He looks around.* Ah, here he is.

Chārudatta *enters with an offering for the divinity of the house. He is accompanied by* Radanika.

Chārudatta (*sighing and looking up*): Once the graceful swans and cranes would fly off with my offering. Now grass grows here, and the seeds I scatter are eaten by the hungry worms. *He walks around sadly a while, then sits down.*

Maitreya (*approaching him*): My greetings to you, sir.

Chārudatta: Ah, my friend Maitreya. It's very good to see you, Maitreya. Sit down.

Maitreya: Thank you. *He sits down.* Jurnavriddha sends you this cloak, fragrant with jasmine, and asks you please to wear it after prayers. *He hands the cloak to* Chārudatta, *who takes it absent-mindedly.* Sir, you look very serious today.

Chārudatta: Happiness hard on the heels of sorrow
Is wonderful: a glowing lamp that scatters darkness.
But a man who falls from riches to poverty,
Though the face he wears is human, wears it on a spiritless body.

Maitreya: Would you rather be dead than poor?

Chārudatta: I'd rather be dead, my friend. Death is only an instant of suffering; but being poor drags on and on.

Maitreya: That well may be, but there is more than that. The money you spent on your friends has increased their respect for you in their hearts. You are like the moon: when three-quarters of her beauty has been drunk by the gods, the quarter that remains seems all the lovelier.

Chārudatta: You misunderstand me.

It is not that I mind the wealth that's lost,
But that my friends desert me, now I'm poor—
That is my sorrow.
Like bees that suck the fragrant exhalation
Of juices on an elephant's shoulders,
And then, the mating season done, ungratefully disappear.

Maitreya: Damn them and double-damn them! They're cattle herders who feed their herds in the greenest pastures. Guests are like that—birds of passage.

Chārudatta: I mean it. It's not the loss of wealth that hurts.

Money comes, money goes.
But that the love of friends should come and go:
That hurts.

A man poor is a man ashamed;
A man ashamed is a man without dignity.
Frustration follows insult, despair follows frustration,
Indecision follows despair.
From this small root, all man's evils grow.

Maitreya: That's the way it is. But let's change the subject.

Chārudatta: There's more. A poor man is laid bare to gossip,

A dogging shame, a crown of thorns.
It brings the scorn of friends, and hate of strangers.
I tell you, Maitreya, if his wife turn against him,
Let him leave her, live in the forest, and
Be sad. Sorrow at most will bring fire down on his soul,
But it will not destroy him.
My friend Maitreya, I have offered prayer to the gods of my house.
Go where the four roads meet and offer better prayers on my behalf.

Maitreya: Not me, sir.

Chārudatta: No?

Maitreya: If the gods don't favour you here, they won't at the four roads either.

Chārudatta: Don't refuse, Maitreya: We do our duty, that is all. I have no doubt that the

gods are pleased with whatever is offered to them in humility and piety, in thought and deed. Go.

Maitreya: No, sir, not me. I might mess things up. Send someone else. I'm a useless Brahmin and as muddle-headed as a mirror—right side left, and left side right. Besides, what's worse, evening is the time when courtesans, thugs, and courtiers stalk the main road. And I'm just the man they'd see a prize catch. No, sir, I'm no guinea pig; I won't be the mouse that gets gobbled up by the snake who's out frog hunting!

Chārudatta: Very well then, stay here. I'll go in and finish my prayers.

He and Radanika *leave.*

Voice (*Offstage*): Vasantasenā, stop! Stop, Vasantasenā!

Maitreya (*hastily follows* Chārudatta): Vasantasenā *enters running in the darkness, pursued by the king's brother-in-law* Sansthanaka, *his personal courtier, and his servant.*

Courtier: Stop, Vasantasenā! Why do you forget your modesty in your fear and run so fast? Your feet should dance—dance, not run. Why do you run like a frightened deer,

looking at the hunters from the corners of your eyes?

Sansthanaka: Stop, Vasantasenā! Why do you run like this, stumbling at each step? You need not fear. My heart overflows with love for you. It is burned to a cinder, sweet girl, like meat on blazing coals.

Servant: Stop, lady, stop! Why do you run like a peahen in summer? My lord can run faster, like a hound chasing a bird in the woods.

Courtier: Stop, Vasantasenā! You are trembling like a plantain tree; the hem of your dress is fluttering in the wind.

Sansthanaka: Stop, Vasantasenā! Why run away from a love that you create? My nights are a ruin; by day you avoid me.

Courtier: Like a bird from a snake, you flee from me. Why, Vasantasenā? How far will you go? I could outstrip the wind if I liked.

Santhanaka: Sir, I have loved her by ten different names. I called her the whip of the god of love. I called her fisheater, flatnose, angel, witch. I called her love's juiciest dish, baggage, bad girl, culture-vulture. All those wonderful sweet names. But, sir, she can't spare a word to throw at me.

Courtier: Why run from us, Vasantasenā?

Sansthanaka: Sweet girl, sweet Vasantasenā, your jewels jingle as you fly from me. I shall catch you, my sweetheart, and kiss you, my sweetheart, as Rama kissed Draupadi.

Servant: Do as he says, lady. He's the king's brother-in-law. Take the flesh and the fish.

Courtier: A hundred stars flash from your waist; your face is marvellous with fear. O goddess, O guardian of our city!

Vasantasenā. Pallavaka! Parabhritika!

Sansthanaka: Men, eh?

Courtier: I know how to deal with *them*.

Vasantasenā. Madhavika, Madhavika!

Courtier: The fool, she's calling her servants.

Sansthanaka: You mean women?

Courtier: Yes.

Sansthanaka: Women, eh? Who's afraid? I can fight a hundred of them at once.

Vasantasenā (*getting no reply*): Not one to help! I'll have to use my wits.

Courtier: Keep searching! She's here somewhere.

Sansthanaka: Scream away, Vasantasenā, scream for your *pallaua* flower and your *madhavika* creeper. Your screams won't help you, the

whole month of April won't help you, when I catch you. Call Bhimasena! My sword's out….slurrp!—there goes your head. Call the son of Kunti, call Ravana himself, the ten-headed demon! Where can you run, my little pet? Your life's in my hands.

Vasantasenā: Sir, I am a woman, a weak woman.

Courtier: One reason you're not dead already.

Sansthanaka: *laugbing.* Not finshd off already!

Vasantasena, (*aside*): How terribly kind! *Aloud.* Sir, why are you chasing me? What do you want? My jewels?

Courtier: Heavens, no! Why pluck the blossoms from a beautiful creeper? No, no, not the jewels.

Vasantasenā. What do you want, then?

Sansthanaka: Your love. Vasantasenā, love me. I'm a splendid lover, I promise you.

Vasantasenā (*angrily*): You insult me, sir. Leave me alone. I'm sick of you.

Sansthanaka (*laughing and clapping his hands*): Now what do you say to that, courtier? This pretty girl is gone, far gone, on me. 'You're sick me', she says. 'You're sick…' That's a good· one. Yes, my pretty little chick, I'm

sick for you. I'm sick, and not because I've been running from village to town looking for you.... By your pretty feet and your pretty head, I'm sick for your love.... Oh, love me, Vasantasenā!

Courtier (*aside*): But what she said was, 'I am sick of you.' The fool! *Aloud.* That's a strange way for a courtesan to talk, Vasantasenā. You know how it is: the doors of a courtesan's house are open to all young men. She is a flower by the roadside. Money will buy her love. She gives the same greeting to the man she likes and to the man she loathes. Come, Vasantasenā, the genius and the fool, the Brahmin and the outcast—the same stream gives a cleansing bath to both. The crow and the peacock perch on the same glittering tree. The soldier and the merchant and the scholar—the same boat takes them all across the river, doesn't it? It's a courtesan's business to be... er... friendly to all.

Vasantasenā: I've never heard of love being forced, sir. It has to be deserved.

Sansthanaka: Is that so? The real trouble, sir, is that this slut is in love with a nobody, a wretch by the name of Chārudatta, whom she met in the garden of Kama's temple. So

she won't give me a second look. His house is near, on our left. See that she doesn't slip out of our fingers into it.

Courtier (*aside*): This utter idiot: he has to say the wrong thing every time! So she's in love with Chārudatta. You don't say. Well, pearl matches pearl. But this moron… *Aloud*. Did you say that Chārudatta's house is on our left? Did you?

Sansthanaka: Yes, on our left. I did. I did.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): Oh, what a relief! On my left. Just by trying to hurt me, he's helped me. The house of the man I love.

Sansthanaka: It's dark, dark! I can't see a thing. Now you see her, now you don't. It's like hunting for a bottle of ink in a coal mine.

Courtier: It is dark. The darkness closes down over my eyes so I can't see even the road. It's all over my body, as if it were raining darkness. My eyes are worthless, like a friend who's played one a dirty trick.

Sansthanaka: I *must* find her.

Courtier: How? Have you anything to go by?

Sansthanaka: Go by? What do you mean?

Courtier: The tinkling of her jewellery, the perfume of her garland…

Sansthanaka: Yes, sir, I hear the fragrance of her garland, but I cannot see the tinkling of her jewels—there's too much darkness here.

Courtier: Listen, Vasantasenā.

Though the darkness hides you, as clouds hide the lightning,
The fragrance of your garland will give you away;
The music of your anklets will give you away.
Where are you, Vasantasenā?

Vasantasenā (*aside*): Thanks for the warning. *She takes off her garland and anklets, and feels her way.* This is the way, I think. I can feel it with my fingers. And here's the back door. Oh dear, it's shut!

Chārudatta (*in his house*): My prayers are finished. Now, Maitreya, it's time for yours. Pray for me at the four roads.

Maitreya: Not me!

Chārudatta: This too!

Who listens to a poor man?
His friends? Once they loved him, now they say good-bye.
His sorrow grows and grows.
The crimes of others are loaded on his shoulders.
No one cares a whit for his once resplendent character.
No one talks to him.

Greetings are formal—politeness without respect.
At a party or a festival the rich men scatter,
Withdraw to a corner, size him up scornfully.
On the street, suddenly conscious of his poor clothing,
He slinks to one side, ashamed.
Are the deadly sins five in number?
No, let us add a sixth: that is, to be poor.
Why do you cling to me, Poverty?
You will get nothing from me.
What will you do when I die? Where will you go then?

Maitreya (*embarrassed*): All right, I'll go. But I should like Radanika to come with me.

Chārudatta: Radanika, go with him.

Radanika: Yes, sir.

Maitreya: Do you mind holding this offering a minute, Radanika, while I open the back door?

Vasantasenä. I'm lucky: the door has opened by itself! *She starts to enter.* Oh! a candle! *She snuffs the candle out with a fold of her dress, and goes in.*

Chārudatta: What was that, Maitreya?

Maitreya: Something blew out the candle—the wind, I think, sir. Never mind. You go first, Radanika. I'll light another candle and follow you.

Sansthanaka: Where the devil has she disappeared to?

Courtier: She's here. She can't go far.

Sansthanaka: I have her! I have her!

Courtier: You fool, let go of me!

Sansthanaka: Oh-ho, oh-ho, beat about, look around… I have her! I have her!

Servant: You have *me,* sir.

Sansthanaka: Me, sir? Oh-ho, oh-ho, master and servant, servant and master. Stay where you are, stay where you are, don't move! Look about, search! Search! *He catches hold of Radanika by the hair.* Oh-ho, I have her. This time I really have her! I can tell her by the scent of the garland. Oh-ho, I have her now!

Courtier: A pretty hide-and-seek we played, didn't we, my sweet girl? That's a nice head of hair, all scented with flowers.

Sansthanaka: I have her by the hair. Oh-ho! I have you, my girl! Scream away, yell, call your friends, curse your God!

Radanika: Sir! Sir! What is all this?

Courtier: Hey, that isn't her voice.

Sansthanaka: I know these cats, sir. When they want milk, they have a different mew. Don't believe her.

Courtier: I'm not sure….Still, why not? She must know the tricks of her trade.

Maitreya *(entering):* How queerly the candle flickers…like the fluttering heart of a goat that can't escape. *He sees* Radanika *and the others.* Radanika!

Sansthanaka: Ho, sir, sir! A man, a man!

Maitreya: He may be poor, but this is still his house. You are going too far, sir.

Radanika: He laid hands on me, Maitreya. He insulted me.

Maitreya: Insulted you? You insult *us,* sir.

Radanika: He laid hands on me, Maitreya.

Maitreya: Who? This one?

Radanika: Yes.

Maitreya (*lifting his staff in anger*): Sir, even a worm will turn—and I, I am a Brahmin! This stick of mine is crooked, sir, but it's still good enough to crack a skull or two!

Courtier: O great Brahmin, please, please…

Maitreya: This can't be the one. *He turns to* Sansthanaka. You are the man. Ha! The

king's own brother-in-law! Ha! Sansthanaka, you coward! You damned sex fiend! Don't you know that Chārudatta is the finest citizen of Ujjain? And you break into his house! And you lay hands on his servants! You idiot, don't you know that poverty isn't a crime—not yet, at least—that there are still plenty of rich rascals around?

Courtier (*considerably embarrassed*): Sir, we had no idea.... We're sorry. It's a case of mistaken identity. We were looking for a girl—

Maitreya (*angrily*): And you found her?

Courtier: Oh, no. No. It was a girl that can take care of herself that we were looking for, and now it seems that we have insulted her in the process. *He points to* Radanika. We didn't mean to. Believe us, we're terribly sorry. *He drops his sword and falls at* Maitreya's *feet.*

Maitreya: I see that *you* at least have sense. It's all right—you may rise. I did not know you when I abused you. I too am sorry.

Courtier: We have more reason to be sorry. I will rise, but on one condition.

Maitreya: Yes?

Courtier: Chārudatta must never know what happened here.

Maitreya: You have my word.

Courtier: There speaks a Brahmin! No sword can harm a man so well grounded in virtue.

Sansthanaka: This is intolerable! Why should you slobber in front of this cardboard man and join your palms and fall at his feet?

Courtier: Fear.

Sansthanaka: Of what?

Courtier: Of Chārudatta's virtue.

Sansthanaka: Fine virtue, that! Why, you can't find a crumb to eat in his house!

Courtier: You do not understand.

It was his virtue brought him poverty.
When rich, he overflowed with kindness.
The summer lake has dried; there were too many thirsty travellers.

Sansthanaka (*stamping his foot*): Son of a slave, and a slave himself! Who is he, anyway? Rama's son? Radha's son? Pandu's son?

Courtier: Hold your tongue!

He is Chārudatta:
A tree of bounty to the poor when he was heavy with fruit,

A patron of good men, a mirror of learning,
The essence of holiness—
In short, a man of character,
Humble, courteous, in every way admirable.
We exist; he *lives*—so rich is the wealth of his virtues.
Come, let us go.

Sansthanaka: Without Vasantasenā?

Courtier: She isn't here.

Sansthanaka: I'm not budging without her.

Courtier: May I remind you of a wise saying?
Hold an elephant with a chain, a horse with horsemanship, a woman with love. Let's go.

Sansthanaka: You may go, but I'm not budging.

Courtier: Very well. *He leaves.*

Sansthanaka: Good riddance! *He speaks to* Maitreya. Now, you hairless lump of holiness, let's see you bow, let's see you bow to us.

Maitreya: We are bowed down already.

Sansthanaka: And who has been bowing you down?

Maitreya: Fate.

Sansthanaka: All right, then, stand up, stand up.

Maitreya: We will.

Sansthanaka: When?

Maitreya: When Fate is kind enough.

Sansthanaka: What a crybaby!

Maitreya: We are crying.

Sansthanaka: Why?

Maitreya: We are poor.

Sansthanaka: Then laugh, you fool, laugh.

Maitreya: We will.

Sansthanaka: When?

Maitreya: When Chārudatta is rich again.

Sansthanaka: In the meantime, then, take this message from me to Chārudatta. Tell him this: "A slip, a fool of a girl, common trash, by the name of Vasantasenā, with a heap of golden things on her, a stage manageress, a female of the species who puts on cheap comedies—this woman saw you in the garden of the temple of Kamadeva. And she lost her heart to you, that is, she fell in love with you. When we tried to set her right, using a bit of persuasion, she slipped in and took shelter in your house. The point is this: if you give her up unconditionally, without my having to go to the police and take legal action, if you hand her over nicely to me,

then you have my best regards. If you don't, you are my enemy, and God help you." See that you break this news to him politely but firmly— and *distinctly;* see that your voice carries as far as the terrace of my splendid house. For, sir, if you swallow a word or two, I'll chew your head off with my own teeth—like this—like a nut cracked in a door hinge.

Maitreya: He will get your message.

Sansthanaka (*to the* Servant): Has the courtier really left?

Servant: Yes, sir.

Sansthanaka: We must be off too.

Servant: You sword, sir.

Sansthanaka: Oh, yes, my sword. You carry it.

Servant: Your sword, sir. Take it.

Sansthanaka (*taking the sword by the wrong end*): Radish pink, my sword sleeps in its sheath on my shoulder. The bitches yap at me from behind—and the dogs! I'm going home, the jackal is going home. *They both leave.*

Maitreya: Radanika, there's no need to tell Chārudatta about this incident. He's up to his neck in misery as it is; this will only make him feel worse.

Radanika: I won't say a word about it to him, sir.

Maitreya: Good.

They leave.

Chārudatta (to Vasantasenā): Don't you think, Radanika, that it's time you brought the boy in? I know that Rohasena enjoys the cool evening, but it gets quite chilly at this hour. I suggest you go and bring him home. And here, cover him with this cloak. *He gives her his cloak.*

Vasantasenā (*aside*): He thinks I'm the servant girl. *She takes the cloak; its fragrance strikes her:* Such sweetness! He isn't a *complete* saint yet. *She puts the cloak on her shoulders.*

Chārudatta: So, Radanika, bring Rohasena home.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): If only I had the right to!

Chārudatta: Even you don't answer, Radanika? Well, that's the way the world is. And why not? Even my closest friends have left me since I became poor.

Maitreya *and* Radanika *re-enter:*

Maitreya: Did you call, sir? Here's Radanika.

Chārudatta: But… then who is this lady? How shameful of me to be so familiar… My shawl…

Vasantasenā (*aside*): How wonderful for me!

Chārudatta: She's half in shadow, a slice of moon
among autumn clouds. No, I mustn't—how
dare I speak like this? She must be
someone's wife....

Maitreya: Not someone's wife, sir. She is
Vasantasenā, who fell in love with you when
she saw you in the temple of Kamadeva.

Chārudatta: Vasantasenā? *He continues to himself.*

But what is the use of returning her love
In my decrepit state? So let it die.
Better a coward should kill his mounting anger.

Maitreya: Sir, the king's brother-in-law sends a
message.

Chārudatta: To *me?*

Maitreya: He says: "a slip, a fool of a girl,
common trash, by the name of Vasantasenā,
with a heap of golden things on her, a stage
manageress, a female of the species who
puts on cheap comedies—this woman saw
you in the garden of the temple of
Kamadeva. And she lost her heart to you,
that is, she fell in love with you. When we
tried to set her right, using a bit of
persuasion—"

Vasantasenā (*aside*): "Set her right, using a bit of
persuasion." Well put!

Maitreya: "—she slipped in and took shelter in your house. The point is this: if you give her up unconditionally, without my having to go to the police and take legal action, if you hand her over nicely to me, then you have my best regards. If you don't, you are my enemy, and God help you."

Chārudatta (*strongly*): He is a fool!

What a remarkable woman she must be!
Money has no fascination for her.
She told him to be off; for me, she has gracious silence.
Let me say how sorry I am, mistaking you for my servant and speaking so boorishly.

Vasantasenā. Oh, sir, it is I who should be sorry, walking in like this, an uninvited guest.

Maitreya: Now isn't that a pretty sight! —two civilized people nodding away like a field of waving grass. Let me also bow my head, though stiffly, like a knock-kneed camel. And let me ask you please to stop nodding—we've had enough—and stand erect.

Chārudatta: Very well, then, no more formalities.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): He is gracious. He is good. But I mustn't take advantage of his goodness—I have no right. Sir, I thank you deeply for your kindness, and I hope you will not mind if I leave these jewels here. I think they were trying to rob me when I ran in.

Chārudatta: This poor house does not deserve such a weighty trust.

Vasantasenā: Sir, it is not houses we trust, but men.

Chārudatta: Maitreya, take these jewels.

Vasantasenā. Thank you very much. *She hands over her jewels.*

Maitreya (*taking them*): Thank you.

Chārudatta: They aren't for you!

Maitreya (*aside*): They're for thieves, I suppose?

Chārudatta: Very soon—

Maitreya (*aside*): What's in our hands is ours. That's logic.

Chārudatta (*to* Vasantasenā): You may have them again whenever you want them.

Vasantasenā. I should be grateful, sir, if you could send an escort with me.

Chārudatta: See her safely home, Maitreya.

Maitreya: You are the best man for that, sir: a fine handsome escort for a graceful lady. I'm a miserable Brahmin, and a poor one; they'll yap at me in the market place, as dogs snap at bits of meat.

Chārudatta: Very well, I'll go with her. Have torches lighted; I don't want any trouble on the way.

Maitreya: Hey, Vardhamanaka!

A servant *enters*. Light the torches.

Vardhamanaka: Without oil, sir?

Maitreya: You're right. Torches are like courtesans—they don't warm up unless you feed them.

Chārudatta: Never mind, we'll do without the torches.

The moon is up, and her starry servants, too,
Pale as first love on a young girl's cheeks.
The moonlight will do.
Look at its crystal light falling like milk on the marshes.

They slowly cross the stage.

Here you are, Vasantasenā.
His voice betrays feeling. She looks at him tenderly, and enters her house.
Now, Maitreya, shall we turn back?
There's not a light on the road now,
Not a creature stirring. Only the watchman.
The night covers many sins.
Let's go home, Maitreya. See that you guard this gold box well at night;
Vardhamanaka will keep his eye on it during the day.

Maitreya: Yes, sir. *They leave.*

CURTAIN

ACT II

At the left side of the stage is the house of Vasantasenā*; on the right, an open field; in the background, a small deserted temple. A* Maid *enters the house.*

Maid: Here is a message from your mother. But where is my mistress? *She looks about her.* Oh, there! *She sees* Vasantasenā *seated, painting, with* Madanika *beside her.* Painting a picture—and lost in her painting.

Vasantasenā. Well, my girl, did you—

Maid: Did what? Why, mistress, you didn't ask me to do anything.

Vasantasenā. I didn't?

Maid: No. And now you ask, "Well, my girl, did you—?"

Vasantasenā (*confused*): I did? Yes, I guess I did.

Maid (*approaching*): Mistress, your mother would like to have you come over today for worship.

Vasantasenā. Tell her, my girl, that today I can't. A Brahmin can take my place.

Maid: Yes, mistress. *She leaves.*

Madanika: Please don't be offended—it isn't impertinence but affection that makes me ask—but whatever did you mean just now?

Vasantasenā: Madanika, tell me frankly: how do I strike you?

Madanika: Well, you're certainly very absent-minded. I think you must be in love.

Vasantasenā: And so I am. You're pretty good judge of feelings, I see.

Madanika: Oh, I'm so happy! The God of love spares no one—and he likes them young! Is it a king you worship? Or a courtier?

Vasantasenā: I do not worship, Madanika. I am in love.

Madanika: Is he a Brahmin—young, pious, brilliant?

Vasantasenā: A Brahmin should be worshiped, not loved.

Madanika: A merchant then—rich, well established, much traveled?

Vasantasenā: Tsk, tsk, Madanika. A merchant is always away, always doing business in foreign lands. Love a merchant? Why, I'd die of loneliness.

Madanika: Not a king. Not a courtier: Not a Brahmin. Not even a merchant. I give up.

Vasantasenā: Oh, Madanika, you went with me to the garden of the temple of Kamadeva.

Madanika: Yes.

Vasantasenā: Then why do you ask? As if you knew nothing!

Madanika: I have it! The man who later helped you when you were being pursued.

Vasantasenā: His name?

Madanika: Why, he lives just a stone's throw from here!

Vasantasenā. But his name, his name?

Madanika: A good name: Chārudatta.

Vasantasenā, *happily*. Yes, you're right, Madanika.

Madanika: But they say he's poor.

Vasantasenā: I love him anyway. And now at least no one can say that it was for his money that I ran after him.

Madanika: But butterflies don't light on to empty flowers, mistress.

Vasantasenā: That's why they're called butterflies.

Madanika: If you love him, then why not at least visit him?

Vasantasenā: I will. All in good time. I have a plan. But if something happens… It's not easy at all. But we'll see. We'll manage.

Madanika: So that's why you left your jewels with him?

Vasantasenā: What a clever girl you are, Madanika!

Voice (*offstage*): Hey! Hey! What about my ten pieces of gold, eh? Stop him! That dirty chiseling gambler! Stop, you! Stop!

The Masseur *runs in, panting.*

Masseur: Damn gamblers! And damn gambling! Aces and deuces and pocket flippers! Bastards! But did I give them the slip? The moment the keeper turned his back! Whew! So here I am, running like mad, but now what's the next stop? The keeper and his gambling friend are close behind. Aha, a deserted temple. Perhaps I could become a temple God, yes? *With comic gestures, he steps up into the niche reserved for the deity.*

Mathura *and the* Gambler *enter.*

Mathura: Ten pieces of gold that massage-man owes us—and he's skedaddled! Stop the bastard! There he goes.

Gambler: You may hide yourself in hell, friend, but we'll fish you out, never fear.

Mathura: You two-timing crook, you double-crosser of honest Mathura! I can hear you—your frightened steps; you're trembling with fear; you're stumbling. Drop dead, you rascal, you blackener of your family's name!

Gambler (*examining the ground*): His footprints stop here.

Mathura (*studying the ground*): Ha, they turn, they turn back, and—And this temple has no idol. *He reflects.* The swine, he walked backward into the temple, with his feet facing front.

Gambler: After him!

Mathura: Ha!

They enter the temple and look around, at first using just sign language. Then they speak.

Gambler: Would you say this idol was made of wood?

Mathura: No, stone, I think. *He gives the "idol" a push; it teeters comically.* Who cares? Well, the masseur's gone. Say, shall we have a little game?

The Gambler *nods, and they start throwing dice.*

Masseur (*fascinated, aside*): It's like the sound of a drum to a king without a kingdom, the rattle of dice to a man without a stake. Fascinating. I know it's bad. To gamble is to fall into ruin. But it's fascinating. The rattle of dice—ah, it's a koel's song.

Gambler: My turn!

Mathura: No, mine.

Masseur (*jumping down out of the niche*): No, no, mine!

Gambler: We have him.

Mathura (*seizing him*): My little pet! And what about those ten pieces of gold?

Masseur: I'll pay.

Mathura: Cough up, cough up! Now!

Masseur: I'll pay. Give me a few days.

Mathura: No! Now!

Masseur: Let go my head! *He falls to the ground. They beat him up.*

Mathura: Ten pieces! Ten solid pieces of gold!

Masseur (*getting painfully to his feet*): Sir, sir! *He speaks worriedly.* I just haven't got the money. You must give me time. How can I pay this minute?

Mathura: A pledge!

Masseur: Oh, all right, all right. *He draws the* Gambler *to him.* Let me off half, and I'll give you half. All right?

Gambler: Suits me.

Masseur (*drawing* Mathura *to him*): I'll give you my word I'll pay you half. Let me off half, won't you?

Mathura: Suits me.

Masseur (*to the* Gambler): You let me off five gold pieces?

Gambler: That's what I said.

Masseur (*to* Mathura): And you let me off five?

Mathura: Suits me.

Masseur: Well, that's that. Be seeing you. *He starts to leave.*

Mathura: Hey, not so fast, friend! Where's my ten pieces?

Masseur: What's wrong? You let me off half, five pieces; and *you* let me off half, five pieces. That's ten pieces. And that's that.

Mathura: Very funny! Look here, friend, my name's Mathura, and no free-and-easy tricks get by with me, see? I want my ten gold pieces, and I want them *now!*

Masseur: I have't got ten.

Mathura: Then sell your father for ten pieces.

Masseur: I have no father.

Mathura: Sell your mother, then.

Masseur: I have no mother.

Mathura: Sell yourself.

Masseur: Whatever you say. All right, take me to the main street.

Mathura: You go in front.

They walk a few steps.

Masseur: Here we go. Hey! Hey! For sale! A bargain! Ten gold pieces for this excellent masseur! *He stops a passer-by.* Hey! What can I do? What *can't* I do? I'll keep house for you. *The passer-by brushes on.* No go. *He stops another.* Hey! Ten gold pieces for me. No? No. Bah! Ah, Chārudatta is no longer my patron. He's poor, so I'm poor. And no one's interested.

Mathura: Come on, cough up, cough up.

Masseur: But I haven't *got* ten pieces. *He is dragged down by* Mathura. Help! Murder! Hey, help! Help! Hey!

Darduraka, *enters.*

Darduraka: A gambler is a king without a crown. Nothing to lose, everything to spend: servants, money, wife, friends—won, kept, and lost at the gambling table. A throw of three took my money…the deuce took my health…the ace threw me out in the street…and the four—that did me in good and proper. Oh, there's Mathura. Well, this shawl should help to hide me. *He examines it.* No, it's threadbare stuff; too many holes—big ones. *He folds it up again and puts it under his arm.* But who cares, anyway? What can he do? He can't eat me.

Mathura (*still addressing the* Masseur): Cough up!

Masseur: I told you: I haven't got the money.

Darduraka (*aside*): What's going on here? *He addresses an imaginary spectator.* What's that you said, sir? — "Mathura's beating up the masseur"? Well, let's see. *He steps forward.* Poor man, he's been beaten black and blue! Poor fellow, what has he to do with gambling? Oh, hello, Mathura.

Mathura: Hello yourself.

Darduraka: And what do I see here?

Mathura: You see a swine who owes me ten gold pieces.

Darduraka: Only ten? Only ten pieces?

Mathura *(pulling* Darduraka's *tattered shawl from under his arm)*: "Only ten? Only ten pieces?" Look who's talking! The man with the threadbare shawl!

Darduraka: Mathura, my foolish friend, haven't you seen me risk ten gold pieces a thousand times? If a man has money, should he lug it around in his pockets? But you, you foolish wretch, you're ready to knock out this poor fellow's five senses for ten pieces.

Mathura: Ten pieces may be "only" ten pieces to you, but to me they're ten solid gold coins.

Darduraka: Good. Good. So why not give him ten solid gold coins, set him free, and let him gamble away?

Mathura: Are you mad?

Darduraka: If he wins, he'll pay you back.

Mathura: And if he loses?

Darduraka: Then he won't pay you back.

Mathura: Bloody clever, aren't you? Why don't *you* give him ten pieces? Look, my name is Mathura and I'm a crook. I play a crooked game—I play it well—and everyone knows it. But you don't frighten me, you lily-livered bastard.

Darduraka: Who's a bastard?

Mathura: *You* are!

Darduraka: Your father was a bigger bastard! *He makes signs to the* Masseur *to try to escape.*

Mathura: Why, you son-of-a-bitch, aren't you a gambler yourself?

Darduraka: Me? A gambler?

Mathura *(turning to the* Masseur, *and starting to drag him by the hair)*: Come on, cough up.

Darduraka: Stop! No one's going to lay hands on him while I'm here!

Mathura, *regardless, punches the* Masseur *on the nose, which starts bleeding. The* masseur *collapses.* Darduraka *steps in, and there is a scuffle between* Darduraka *and* Mathura.

Mathura: You damned son-of-a-bitch! I'll get you for this!

Darduraka: You fool! Suppose I say you beat me up on the road as I was quietly passing by? You'll see in court tomorrow if they let you off so easily.

Mathura: All right we shall see, we shall see.

Darduraka: You will? And how will you see?

Mathura *(thrusting his face in* Darduraka's *and opening his eyes wide):* Like this. Does that satisfy you?

Darduraka *throws a handful of dust in his eyes;* Mathura *flinches and falls back;* Darduraka *makes signs to the* Masseur *to escape. The* Masseur *scrambles up and runs off.*

Darduraka: This fellow has a lot of influence around here; I'd better scoot too. My friend Sharvilaka tells me he heard a prophecy that a cowherd named Āryaka is going to be king. He'd be the best leader for such as us. I'll hunt him up. *He hastens off.*

Masseur (*running and stumbling toward* Vasantasenā's *house*): This house is open. *He enters and sees* Vasantasenā. Please help me. Please help me.

Vasantasenā: Don't be afraid—you are safe here. Madanika, shut the door. *The maid does so.* What are you afraid of?

Masseur: I owe a man some money.

Vasantasenā. Madanika, open the door.

Masseur (*aside*): She isn't afraid of creditors. Little does she know. But it's a good proverb that says a man must face the music—meaning that I'll have to face it.

Mathura (*to the* Gambler, *rubbing his eyes*): Cough up, cough up!

Gambler: He isn't here. While you two were scuffling, the swine scuttled off.

Mathura: I gave him a punch on the nose, though, and he's bleeding. He won't get far. We'll track him down. Look, here's blood. *They follow the trail of blood.*

Gambler: He's in here. He *stops at* Vasantasenā's *door.*

Mathura: Good-bye, ten pieces. My ten gold pieces, pieces, good-bye.

Gambler: Let's go file a complaint in court.

Mathura: And have the bird fly away while we're gone? Not me! I'm sitting tight till the bastard coughs up.

Inside, Vasantasenā *makes a sign to* Madanika.

Madanika: Sir, my mistress wishes to know where you come from, who you are, why you are here, and what you are really afraid of.

Masseur: Well, I was born in Pataliputra, the son of a householder. I'm a masseur.

Vasantasenā: A delicate, pleasant art, sir.

Masseur: I learned it very well, madam, so now it's just routine work.

Madanika: I see. Go on.

Masseur: While with my father, madam, I used to hear visitors tell stories of other lands and I wanted to see things for myself. So I came to Ujjain and became masseur to a first-class gentleman, a model of good manners and more handsome than I can say. He was quick to give away money and bore insults in silence, forgiving his worst enemy—in short, such a fine man that he seemed to be caring for the whole world.

Madanika: Is there such a man in Ujjain?

Vasantasenā: I know him. My heart tells me.

Madanika: Go on.

Masseur: He gave so freely, so liberally, that—

Vasantasenā: —he hasn't anything left.

Masseur: How did you guess? Did I—?

Vasantasenā: I only had to put two and two together. Goodness and money go together very seldom. But you can't call a good man *poor;* such a man is richer than anyone else.

Madanika: And his name?

Masseur: Who hasn't heard of him? Who hasn't heard of the moon? His name is Chārudatta. He lives very near here.

Vasantasenā (*standing up, looking very happy*): A fan, Madanika. Can't you see he's tired? Sit down, sir. There's no need to be formal.

Masseur (*aside*): All this at the mere mention of his name! God bless you, Chārudatta! You really live; others merely pass time in the world. *He falls at* Vasantasenā's *feet*. Thank you, madam. Please sit down. I'm all right like this.

Vasantasenā: But go on with your story.

Masseur: Well, as I said, I was his masseur, but when he had on more money left I took to gambling. And my luck was against me and I lost ten gold pieces.

Mathura (*outside*): I've been cheated! I've been robbed!

Masseur: That's him, madam. Him and the other one. What shall I do?

Vasantasenā *(removing her bracelet and giving it to* Madanika): Give them this, Madanika, and say this gentleman sends it.

Madanika: Yes, mistress.

Mathura (*outside*): I've been robbed!

Madanika, *emerges unobserved by a side door.*

Madanika (*aside*): Such shouting and crying! Such muttering and anxiety! And the way their eyes are pinned to the front door! These must be the ones. *Aloud*. Good morning, sir.

Mathura, And good morning to you.

Madanika: Which of you gentlemen is the chief gambler?

Mathura: Me, my pretty one. But it won't do. No pouting lips at me, no sweet words. Don't give me the come-hither, my girl. I have no money.

Madanika: Gamblers don't talk like that. Is there someone who owes you money?

Mathura: Yes, ten gold pieces. Why?

Madanika: My mistress sends this—no, *he* sends this, by way of payment.

Mathura (*grabbing the bracelet*): Aha! Tell him we're quits. And tell him to drop in again whenever he wants some fun.

Mathura *and the* Gambler *leave.*

Madanika (*returning to* Vasantasenā): They've gone, looking very pleased.

Vasantasenā: Now, sir, you may go safely.

Masseur: If I can be of any help to you, madam…

Vasantasenā: You can be of more help to the man for whom you were working and thanks to whom you learned your art.

Masseur (*aside*): A neat way of saying, "No thanks." *Aloud.* Madam, my work brings me

only disgrace. I'm going to become a Buddhist monk.

Vasantasenā: Don't do anything rash.

Masseur: My mind's made up. *He starts to leave.* When I gambled everyone looked down on me. Now I can hold my head high and walk freely in the streets. *Loud shouts are heard offstage.* What's up now? *He looks around.* What! Vasantasenā's hunting elephant has broken loose? Ha! What fun! I must go see the mad beast! Oops! — I nearly forgot. I'd decided to become a monk. It won't do. *He leaves.*

Karnapuraka *(splendidly dressed, rushes in, in high elation):* Where is she? Where is my lady?

Madanika: What's the matter with you? Are you out of your senses? She's right there in front of you.

Karnapuraka: Your humble servant, my lady.

Vasantasenā: You look very happy, Karnapuraka. What is it?

Karnapuraka (*beaming*): Oh, what a pity you were not there to see the bravery of your servant!

Vasantasenā: Why, what did you do?

Karnapuraka: Well…your elephant—the one called "Gate-Smasher"—well, he killed his keeper, broke his chain, and banged out onto the main road. Oh, what a ruckus! Men shrieking all over the place: "Get the babies out of here! Climb up the tree! Get up on the roof! The elephant's broken loose!" Snip went the girdles, snap went the anklets; snip went the pearls, snap went the diamonds. Oh, what a glorious rain of jewels! And then came the elephant, barging into Ujjain as if it were a lotus pond, with his trunk flailing, his feet and tusks ripping things apart! Along came a holy man—a beggar. Swoosh went the water from the mad beast's trunk; the begging bowl was smashed, the beggar's staff broken in two—and there he was, caught up between the animal's tusks. The men gathered round, shrieking, "He'll be killed! He'll be killed!"

Vasantasenā: Oh, how horrible, how horrible!

Karnapuraka: No, don't worry. Just listen. There was the poor beggar right between his tusks, when I saw him—I mean, when I, your humble servant, saw him. And I grabbed an iron rod from a shop, tripped but kept running, dashed in from one corner and stood in front of the beast….

Vasantasenā: Go on, go on.

Karnapuraka: And I plunged the rod into him—he was a great mountain of a beast—with all my strength. And he fell, and I saved the holy man.

Vasantasenā: Isn't that wonderful! How brave of you!

Karnapuraka: And all the people in the city were suddenly all over me, showering me with praise, there near the beast lying like a boat tipped over on its side. One of them looked at me, sighed, and threw this shawl over me.

Vasantasenā: Does it smell of perfume? Jasmine?

Karnapuraka: I can't tell, my lady; my nose is full of elephant smell.

Vasantasenā: Is there a name on it?

Karnapuraka: A few letters. Read them, my lady.
He hands her the shawl.

Vasantasenā (*reading*): Chārudatta. *She folds the shawl around her.*

Madanika: It looks nice on her, doesn't it?

Karnapuraka: I think so.

Vasantasenā: This is for you, Karnapuraka. *She gives him a jewel.*

Karnapuraka (*taking it and bowing*): Nice? I'll say it does!

Vasantasenā: And where is Charudatta now?

Karnapuraka: Well, my lady, he was going home. He'll be passing by this road.

Vasantasenā: Quick, Madanika, to the balcony. Perhaps we'll catch a glimpse of him as he walks by.

They leave.

CURTAIN

ACT III

Outside Chārudatta's *house.* Vardhamanaka, Chārudatta's *servant, enters.*

Vardhamanaka: A good kind master is the man for me. Who cares if he is poor? A sullen snob's the very devil even if he has all the money in the world. That's the way it is. You can't keep a hungry bull out of a wheat field; you can't stop a gay blade from chasing another man's wife; you can't stop a gambler from gambling; and you can't stop a fool from making a fool of himself. My master is still at the concert, and it's not quite midnight yet, so there's still time before he returns. I think I'll take a little snooze in the hall. *He goes inside.*

Chārudatta *and* Maitreya *enter and walk toward the house.*

Chārudatta: Rebhila sang exquisitely, don't you think? And the vina is a pearl of an instrument. It soothes the waiting lover; it consoles lovers who are separated. It adds a sad sweetness to sweet sadness.

Maitreya (*impatiently*): Yes, yes, yes. It's time we were home.

Chārudatta: Oh, but he sang exquisitely, didn't he?

Maitreya: Well, if you must know, there are two things I can't stand: one is a woman reading Sanskrit aloud, and the other is a man trying to sing in a soft key. When a woman reads Sanskrit, all you get is "moosh, moosh, moosh," as if a calf were sneezing. And when a man tries singing softly, he's like a priest chanting through his nose. I tell you, it's not pleasant at all.

Chārudatta: You are hard to please. But Rebhila sang exquisitely this evening.

Melody, warmth, a smoothness, peacefulness.
Oh, I could feel it.
Almost as if the lyrical voice of a girl
Were singing—such sweetness!
It seemed that my own love was singing.
I can hear it even as I walk with you now—
I'll never forget it—
The trembling on a theme,
The dying fall.

Maitreya: Fine, fine. But let's get home. Even the street dogs are fast asleep. And there's the moon stepping down through the clouds, leaving the world to pitch-darkness.

Chārudatta: Yes, only his tusks are visible,

Two sharp eyes above the surrounding darkness,
Like an elephant browsing in a forest pool.

Maitreya: Well, here we are. Vardhamanaka, wake up! Open the door!

Vardhamanaka: That's Maitreya's voice. They're back. *He opens the door.* Sir, the couch is ready.

Maitreya: Call Radanika; we need water for our feet.

Chārudatta: Let her sleep. Why disturb her now?

Vardhamanaka: I'll get the water, Maitreya, and you can wash his feet.

Maitreya (*losing his temper*): The impertinent son of a slave! He will bring the water; and I—a Brahmin—must wash the feet!

Chārudatta: Oh, come, Maitreya, you get the water and he'll wash my feet, if that suits you better.

Vardhamanaka: Gladly. Yes, Maitreya, you bring the water.

Maitreya *bring water;* Vardhamanaka, *washes* Chārudatta's *feet, then starts to move away.*

Chārudatta: And now, Vardhamanaka, what about washing the Brahmin's feet?

Maitreya: Don't bother. It's water wasted, because I shall be going out again, trudging along like a dirty donkey.

Vardhamanaka: But you are a Brahmin, Maitreya.

Maitreya: Yes, sir. I am a Brahmin among Brahmins, like a boa constrictor among snakes.

Vardhamanaka: Then I must wash your feet. *He does so*. And here's the golden box, which I look after during the day. It's night now, so it's your turn. *He gives* Maitreya *the box, and leaves.*

Maitreya: The golden box! Isn't there a single thief in the city of Ujjain who'll steal this stealer of my sleep? Let me just put it away inside.

Chārudatta: Of course not. It has been left in our care. Look after it, as a good Brahmin should. It must be returned safely to its owner. *He lies down.*

Such sweetness!
It seemed that my own love was singing….

Maitreya: Going off to sleep?

Chārudatta: Yes, I hope so. Sleep comes over me like old age, nibbling away at my powers of resistance. So let us sleep.

They both fall asleep.

Act III

Sharvilaka *enters the garden stealthily.*

Sharvilaka: How I skinned myself crawling on the ground, like a snake wriggling out of its skin! But I've managed to slip through. *He looks up.* The moon has set. Night's a good mother to people like me who work in the dark and slink off when the guards come. I've scaled the garden wall all right and got in; now for the house. They call it a crime, this slinking in under cover of darkness, making hay while others sleep. We're crooks, they say. All right, I'd sooner be a crook than an exploited slave. Besides, I'm in good company: didn't Drona's son himself prowl and strike by night? But now, how do I get in? on which side is the wall dampest—that will make the least noise. Where can I make a hole that I can cover up later? Where is the brickwork old and crumbling? How do I get in so that no woman spots me? And where's the swag? That's what the textbook says. *He feels the wall.* This spot seems a bit weak: it's been exposed to the sun and rotted away. And here's a convenient rathole. Wonderful! O God of thieves, blessed sir! A thousand thanks! Sir, you advise four ways of breaking in. First for baked bricks—pull them out. Second for unbaked bricks—cut through them. Third for clay—soften it up by wetting. Fourth for wood—saw through it. Here we

have baked bricks. So pull them out. Here goes! *He starts to work.* Next, what shape shall I make the hole? Lotus, lake, half-moon, sun? Swastika, waterpot? The book says take your choice. The waterpot: that will look nice in this wall. Last night they complained I wasn't artistic: my breaches, they said, should have been made with better taste. O God of thieves, blessed sir, thanks again. O giver of good, O God of the golden spear, a thousand thanks. And thanks to my teacher, who taught me the whole bag of tricks. No one sees me, no sword finds me…. Damn, I've forgotten my tape. I hope this will do instead. *He unties the cord from round his neck.* The sacred thread's a useful thing to a Brahmin, especially a Brahmin like me. It's just the thing to measure walls; it's handy to pull up jewellry, to pick locks; and if a snake bites, it's first-class for first aid. But let's get going. First, measure the wall. Then out with the bricks. *He works.* One still left. Damn it, a snake! *He quickly pulls out his hand and ties the sacred thread round one finger.* That should do for now. *He peeps through the hole.* I see a light, a candle. The light floods the darkness like pure gold. *He completes the breach in the wall.* Now in I go. No, wait; first, the "feeler." That's what the book says. *He puts his hand through and gropes*

about. All clear. A thousand thanks, blessed sir. *He crawls through.* Two men sleeping. I'd better open the front door: it helps in an emergency. *He starts to open it.* How it creaks! Everything's rusty here. A little water. *He sees the jug, takes it, and sprinkles water on the door.* Not too much—it might make a splash on the floor. *He puts his back against the door and carefully eases it open.* That's done. Now, are these two really out or just faking? *He passes the candle close over their faces.* Fast asleep. *He looks around.* What's this? A drum…a lute…pipes…books. Hell, have I got into the house of a poet? A dancer? I thought he was a big shot. I don't steal from beggars. Is he really poor or is he just hiding his money? Afraid of thieves? Afraid of the king? Well, if he's got it buried around here, these will tell. *He scatters special seeds.* Nothing. Poor fellow. What am I doing here, then?

Maitreya (*talking in his sleep to* Chārudatta): I see a hole in the wall. I see a thief. Here, you'd better keep the golden box.

Sharvilaka: Has he seen me? Is he making fun of me? Then he dies, the swine! *He comes close to* Maitreya *and studies him.* No, he's just babbling in his sleep. What's this? Something wrapped in a towel. How about

taking it? No, it wouldn't be right. He's a poor man; why make him even poorer? *He starts to move away.*

Maitreya: Take it, take it away, for the sake of a sacred cow, for the sake of a Brahmin!

Sharvilaka: Well, if it's come to cows and Brahmins, then it's all right for me to take it. But that light! My pretty flame snuffers will take care of that. *He extracts a moth from his kit.* Just the right time and the right place. Dear friend, flutter round the wick; pretty moth, snuff out the light with your wings. *The moth does so.* There, now it's dark. But the greater darkness is the one that's fallen on me—me, Sharvilaka, a Brahmin and the son of a Brahmin who knew the scriptures by heart—me, doing this. And for whom? For a common courtesan like Madanika! But it's too late for tears now. Let's get on with it. Thanks, Brahmin, I'll take the box. *He stretches out his hand toward the casket.*

Maitreya: Oh, how cold your fingers are!

Sharvilaka: Idiot of a thief that I am! That water chilled them. I'll warm them. *He rubs them on his thigh; then takes the casket.*

Maitreya: You have it safe?

Sharvilaka: Yes, Brahmin, I have it.

Maitreya: Good. Now, like a vendor who's sold all his goods, I can sleep in peace.

Sharvilaka: Sleep, sir, sleep a thousand years. Oh, what a shameful thing to do—and all for the sake of love. To ruin this good Brahmin for the sake of Madanika! I hate it, but I do it. And now to Vasantasenā's house, to buy Madanika freedom! *He listens.* Footsteps! Who can it be? Shall I stand motionless and let him pass? Bah, what do I care about watchmen? I crawl like a cat, run like a deer, pounce like a hawk, twist like a snake and yowl like a dog! I'm a lamp, a horse, a boat, a snake, a rock. I'm a wolf, a lion, the king of birds and the prince of hares.

Radanika (*entering*): Where is Vardhamanaka? He was sleeping outside, I know, but he isn't their now. I must find Maitreya.

Sharvilaka (*he starts to stab her, then stops*): Just a girl! I'm safe.

He slips to the door.

Radanika (*frightened*): Help! A thief! Stop, thief! He's cut through the wall. There he goes! Maitreya, wake up! Where are you? A thief! A thief! There he goes, out the door!

Maitreya: What thief? What's all this nonsense?

Radanika: Don't be silly. Help! Thief! Can't you see? There!

Maitreya: What? The door's open! Help! Chārudatta, wake up! A thief broke in and he's escaped! Wake up!

Chārudatta: I'm in no mood for jokes, Maitreya.

Maitreya: This is no joke. Look!

Chārudatta: Where? How did he get in?

Maitreya: There.

Chārudatta (*seeing the breach in the wall*): But that's well done! A very neat bit of work. Just look: a few bricks from the top, more below. Why, this fellow is a genius.

Maitreya: Either the man's new to this city and doesn't know how poor we are—for everyone in Ujjain knows there's nothing to steal in this house—or else he was a beginner just practising.

Chārudatta: Very likely a stranger to this city. He probably didn't know about my poverty and thought that the house looked promising from the outside. How disappointed he must have been when he ran away. Poor fellow! He'll have to go round admitting to his

friends, "I broke into a merchant's house—and found nothing!"

Maitreya: Yes. He must have entered with high hopes—for a jewel box at least. (*He remembers his dream.*) A golden box! Thank goodness! You always call me a fool, don't you? "Maitreya, you know nothing! Maitreya, you're a baby!" Well, wasn't it brilliant of me to hand the golden box over to you in the middle of the night? If not, the thief would have walked off with it.

Chārudatta: The box? What are you talking about?

Maitreya: No, no, I'm serious. I may be a fool, but I know when to joke and when not to.

Chārudatta: When did you give me the box?

Maitreya: Don't you remember? When I said your fingers were cold?

Chārudatta: I don't know. You might have. *He searches; then speaks in a cheerful tone.* Well, thank you, Maitreya.

Maitreya: Whatever for?

Chārudatta: The box *has* been stolen. At least, it isn't here.

Maitreya: But why should I be thanked?

Chārudatta: Because at least the poor fellow didn't go away empty-handed.

Maitreya: But it's the box that we were supposed to keep in safe custody.

Chārudatta: *That* box! *He faints.*

Maitreya: Oh, I'm sorry. But it isn't *your* fault that a thief ran off with a box left in your care.

Chārudatta (*recovering*): Maitreya, who will believe us? The poor man is always suspected—that's the way it is. Till now Fate was unkind only to my riches; now she is unkind to my good name.

Maitreya: What's to prevent us from saying that she never gave us the box? She never gave it; we never took it. There was no witness.

Chārudatta: Tell a lie like that? Never. I will beg in the streets and pay off the entire amount of the box. It's a blot on my soul. *He leaves, followed by* Maitreya.

Radanika: I must go tell his wife. *She goes out and returns immediately with* Chārudatta's *wife.*

Wife: Is he safe? And is Maitreya safe?

Radanika: Both are safe, mistress. But the jewels of the courtesan have been stolen. Are you ill?

Wife (*recovering from the shock*): Yes. Oh, I'm so happy he's safe! But what will people

say? They'll suspect right away that he stole it himself because he's poor. (*She sighs*). How strange Fate is! She plays with our fortunes and makes them as ephemeral as drops of water on a lotus leaf. There's always this necklace that my mother gave me—all I have left. But my husband has his pride: he would never accept it. (*She reflects.*) Radanika, call Maitreya here.

Radanika *goes out, then comes back with* Maitreya.

Maitreya: You honour me by calling me.

Wife: You honour me, too. You will honour me even more by facing me and looking squarely into my eyes.

Maitreya: That's easily done.

Wife: Here, Maitreya, take this. *She offers the necklace.*

Maitreya: Why?

Wife: I observed the jewel ceremony this morning—and the customary present has to be made to a Brahmin. You are the first Brahmin I have met since this morning. So take it—the necklace is yours.

Maitreya (*taking the necklace*): I must go tell Chārudatta.

Wife: Do it tactfully, Maitreya. See you don't embarrass me. (*She leaves.*)

Maitreya: What a marvellous woman!

Chārudatta *enters*, *unseen by* Maitreya.

Chārudatta: What's the matter with Maitreya? I hope his distress doesn't lead him to do anything rash. Maitreya!

Maitreya: Here I am. This is for you. *He shows the necklace.*

Chārudatta: Where did you get this?

Maitreya: This comes of having an excellent wife.

Chārudatta: Excellent, indeed! But oh, that I should fall so low as to have to depend on a woman's jewels! That comes of being poor; a man becomes helpless, and a woman takes his place. But no, I shouldn't call myself poor. I have a wife who loves me in spite of my poverty; I have a friend who stands by me, come fair wind, come foul. And, thank goodness, I have a few principles left. Take this necklace to Vasantasenā, Maitreya. Tell her we gambled away the golden box, forgetting it was hers, and that I send this necklace instead.

Maitreya: No, I can't. Are we going to give away this priceless sacred ornament for a silly box

that a thief has decamped with? What did we get out of the box?

Chārudatta: What does that matter? The box was left in our trust. She trusted us—is there anything nobler than that? Listen to me. By this hand I place on my breast, you shall not return till you have given this necklace into her hands. (*He calls.*) Vardhamanaka, put those bricks back in place again. I don't want tongues wagging over this new scandal. Come, come, Maitreya, you're being stubborn.

Maitreya: What's the use? Beggars can't be choosers.

Chārudatta: Who says I am a beggar? I have a wife who loves me in spite of my poverty. I have a friend who stands by me, come fair wind, come foul. And, thank goodness, I have a few principles left. You go ahead and do as I say. And I must go about my morning prayers.

They all leave.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

Vasantasenā's *house*. *A* Maid *enters the reception court.*

Maid: Another message from her mother. (*She looks up.*) Ah, there comes my mistress, looking at a picture and talking to Madanika.

Vasantasenā and Madanika *enter*.

Vasantasenā: You think this resembles Chārudatta? You really do?

Madanika: Oh, yes.

Vasantasenā: How can you tell?

Madanika: From the way you look at it with so much love in your eyes.

Vasantasenā: You're just being polite, as all we courtesans are.

Madanika: But politeness can be true too, sometimes.

Vasantasenā: Not with us, I'm afraid. We meet so many kinds of men that mostly we're reduced just to saying pretty things.

Madanika: But you needn't have asked. The way you looked at the picture, it was obvious….

Vasantasenā: Tell me, Madanika, do I behave strangely these days? I don't want to have my friends giggling at me behind my back.

Madanika: You're all right, mistress. Women understand one another pretty well.

Maid (*approaching*): A carriage is waiting for you at the side door, mistress; but your mother also wishes you would come.

Vasantasenā: Was it Chārudatta who sent the carriage?

Maid: No, mistress. But the man who sent it has sent ten thousand gold pieces with it.

Vasantasenā: Who is it?

Maid: Sansthanaka, the king's brother-in-law.

Vasantasenā (*angrily*): No. Go tell him I'm busy. And don't bother me again!

Maid: Forgive me, mistress. I was only bringing the message.

Vasantasenā. I'm not angry with you; I'm angry with the message.

Maid: But what news shall I take back to your mother?

Vasantasenā. Tell her, if she doesn't want me dead, to stop sending such messages. *She goes into the house, followed by* Madanika.

Maid: Yes, mistress. *She leaves.*

Sharvilaka *enters the house.*

Sharvilaka: I am like the moon, brightest at night, killed by the light of day. Last night I worked wonders: I defied sleep and baffled the watchmen. But this morning I'm just a bundle of nerves. Who was that following me out there? Why was he chasing me? I didn't like the looks of him. Damn it, a man's worst enemy is his own conscience. At least I did it for Madanika—that's some consolation. But it was a close shave all the way. I made it a point to talk to no servants, and *no* woman; and when the guards passed by, I stood as still as a doorpost. I had a busy time last night—a hundred little tricks.

Vasantasenā (*inside the house*): Put this painting on the couch, and bring me my fan.

Sharvilaka: Vasantasenā's house! (*He sees* Madanika *emerge and start toward another door into the house.*) Graceful as Love's own bride! Though my heart is aflame, she cools my eyes. *He calls.* Madanika!

Madanika (*turning, startled*): Oh, it's you, Sharvilaka! How nice to see you. Where have you been all this time?

Sharvilaka: I'll tell you later.

They gaze long and lovingly at each other.

Vasantasenā (*inside*): Where has she gone? She *does* take her time. (*She opens a window and looks out.*) There she is, talking to a man. She looks completely lost in him. That must be the man who wants to buy her freedom. Good. No one should interfere with true love. She'll come when she's through.

Madanika: Sharvilaka, tell me—(*He keeps looking around him in a worried way.*) Why do you look like that, Sharvilaka? What's wrong?

Sharvilaka: Can you keep a secret? Are you sure we're alone?

Madanika: Absolutely alone.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): A secret? I shouldn't be listening.

Sharvilaka: Tell me, Madanika, if I ask Vasantasenā to set you free, what price will she demand?

Vasantasenā (*aside*): If it concerns me, there's no harm in listening.

Madanika: She's often said that if she had her way she'd free all of us without asking anything. But where have you managed to lay hands on so much money that you can buy my freedom?

Sharvilaka: I was poor. I was in love. So last night I did something I shouldn't have done. I sinned.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): He looks too happy to have a crime on his conscience.

Madanika: Sharvilaka, you did it for *me*? You risked both for *me*?

Sharvilaka: Both what?

Madanika: Your life and your good name.

Sharvilaka: Oh, it was nothing. Fortune favours the brave.

Madanika: I know you, Sharvilaka: you are a good man. I know you couldn't have done anything very bad—even for my sake—could you?

Sharvilaka: Well, I didn't steal from a woman. After all, jewels are to make women beautiful, as flowers do a plant. I didn't steal a Brahmin's money, if that's what you mean. Brahmins collect money for holy purposes, I know that. I didn't kidnap a baby from his nurse. I may be a thief, but I know the difference between right and wrong. Tell Vasantasenā these jewels are for her, but no one should see them. They aren't meant to be worn by women.

Madanika: Jewels? And not to be worn by women? Let me see them.

Sharvilaka: Here. (*He brings them out and shows them uneasily*).

Madanika: Haven't seen these before somewhere? Where did you get them?

Sharvilaka: That's my business. Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.

Madanika (*angrily*): If you love me, why are you afraid to tell me?

Sharvilaka: All right, if you must know.... Last night a little bird told me that in the business quarter of the city a man called Chārudatta—

Vasantasenā *and* **Madanika** *both faint.*

Sharvilaka: Madanika! What's the matter? Can't you hear me? Have I done wrong?

Madanika (*recovering*): You fool! Tell me, did you hurt anyone? Did you kill anyone in the house where you stole these?

Sharvilaka: I'm not a scoundrel: I don't kill sleeping men. I harmed no one.

Madanika: Is that true? Are you sure?

Sharvilaka: Of course, I'm sure.

Vasantasenā (*recovering*): Thank God!

Madanika: Thank God!

Sharvilaka (*jealously*): What's going on here anyway, Madanika? I did it because I love you. You know my family commands respect: my virtue is of some worth. Is this all I get for the love and devotion I've shown for you—that you should love another man? Oh, I know all the tricks: a good man duped by a cunning courtesan, like a fruit tree pecked bare by greedy birds. Lust is all. Our beauty—money, love—bah! The fire of lust devours them all.

Vasantasenā (*smiling*): Poor man, he's little worked up.

Sharvilaka: Bah! I should know better. We're fools, all of us who believe in women and in money! A woman is a snake—don't trust her—and so money. Never love a woman—no, no! Let her love you. Let her bring you sweet words and soft lips, encourage her, and then jilt her. It's a wise man who said: a woman will laugh and cry for money and makes use of a man's trust as long as it suits her. Run, young man, if you value your purse and your good name. A woman is a flower that grows in a graveyard. You can trust the changing ocean, the fickle colours of sunset, but not a woman. All she's after

is your money: once you're empty as a powder box, off she goes. What fun she has: one man she loves, another she flirts with and a third she takes to bed with her. But what else could you expect? No lotus grows on a mountain; no damn ass bears a horse's harness; you don't get rice from barley seed; and you don't get honesty from a woman. Oh, what a fool I've been! Chārudatta, this time you shall die!

Madanika (*catching hold of him*): What has come over you? You're behaving like a fool! (*She moves away from him*).

Sharvilaka: Who's a fool?

Madanika: These jewells belong to Vasantasenā.

Sharvilaka: They do?

Madanika: And she had left them with Chārudatta.

Sharvilaka: She had?

Madanika: And here's why. *She whispers in his ear.*

Sharvilaka (*looking silly*): Damn it, I didn't mean to rob *him* in order to free you.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): I'm glad he's sorry. He acted foolishly.

Sharvilaka: So what now, Madanika?

Madanika: You should know.

Sharvilaka: I wish I did. Man learns only from books, but a woman is born with common sense.

Madanika: Well, I think you should give these jewels back to Chārudatta.

Sharvilaka: And go to jail?

Madanika: Did you ever hear of heat coming from the moon?

Vasantasenā (*aside*): Thank you, Madanika.

Sharvilaka: I'm not so much afraid of him, Madanika, as of myself. What made me do such a shameful thing? I'd feel so small having to face him. Can't you think of anything else?

Madanika: Well…

Vasantasenā (*aside*): I should like to know, too.

Madanika: You can always say to my mistress that you're Chārudatta's servant and return the jewels to her.

Sharvilaka: How will that help?

Madanika: Then you're not a thief. Chārudatta has lost nothing, for my mistress has her jewels.

Sharvilaka: What! You rob me, a robber?

Madanika: And if you don't do as I say, you'll be a real robber, with the guards searching for you everywhere.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): I do admire you, Madanika. You're a good friend.

Sharvilaka: Thanks for that advice. I was lost in darkness, and you came like the moon.

Madanika: Wait here. I'll go tell my mistress.

Sharvilaka: Right.

Madanika *enters the house and speaks to* Vasantasenā. A Brahmin from Chārudatta has come to see you.

Vasantasenā. How do you know he comes from Chārudatta?

Madanika: I have my own ways of knowing, mistress.

Vasantasenā (*smiling*): Naturally. Let him come in.

Madanika (*emerging to the court*): Come in, Sharvilaka: *She escorts him in to* Vasantasenā.

Sharvilaka (*embarrassed*): Chārudatta sends greetings.

Vasantasenā: I am glad to receive them. You may sit.

Sharvilaka: He says his house is insecure. So he returns this box, and hopes you will not mind. *He gives it to* Madanika *and starts to leave.*

Vasantasenā: That was very thoughtful of him. Wait: I have something for him.

Sharvilaka (*aside*): I didn't think of that. *Aloud.* What message shall I take?

Vasantasenā: No message. Take Madanika.

Sharvilaka: I don't understand.

Vasantasenā. You see, we had an agreement that the person who returned the box would get Madanika as a present from me on Chārudatta's behalf. So take her, and thank Chārudatta for his kindness.

Sharvilaka (*aside*): She's seen through the game. Thank you, Chārudatta. *Aloud.* Thank you.

Vasantasenā (*calling*): Is my carriage here?

A **Servant** enters.

Servant: Your carriage is ready, mistress.

Vasantasenā: You may go, Madanika. Use my carriage. Look at me, my girl—and smile. That's better. And think of me now and then.

Madanika (*sobbing*): What shall I do? *She falls at* Vasantasenā *feet.*

Vasantasenā: Don't be silly, my girl. Stand up. I should honour *you* now. Go. Everything's ready. But think of me.

Sharvilaka: How can I thank you, sweet lady? Bow to her, Madanika. She has given you the dignity of a wife. Smile, Madanika.

All three emerge into the courtyard. Sharvilaka *and* Madanika *salute* Vasantasenā *and step into the carriage, which has been waiting in the courtyard.*

Voice (*from the street*): A proclamation by the governor! A proclamation by the governor! "To all citizens." Hear ye! "An astrologer has declared that the son of a cowherd, by the name of Āryaka, will be king. Therefore King Palaka has thought fit to arrest him and put him in solitary confinement. There is nothing to fear. There is nothing to fear. This is a warning."

Sharvilaka: Āryaka, my friend, arrested! And I, married and about to live happily ever after! No. Two things are dear in this world: a friend and a mistress. But a friend is worth a hundred mistresses any day. I must go. *He gets down from the carriage.*

Madanika: Don't leave me now, my lord. At least take me first to the house of one of your friends, where I can stay safely.

Sharvilaka: And so I will, my love. *To the* Coachman. Hey you, have you any idea where the singer Rebhila lives?

Coachman: Yes, sir.

Sharvilaka: Take my wife there.

Coachman: Yes, sir.

Madanika: Take care of yourself, dearest. I'll be waiting for you.

The carriage drives her away.

Sharvilaka (*aside*): Now to work. First I must get in touch with Āryaka friends—all of us who have suffered at the hands of this king and are ready to fight back. This is most illegal, most treacherous—the act of spineless king. But we'll have you out, Āryaka, in no time. How long can they eclipse the moon? *He leaves.*

A Maid *enters.*

Maid (*seeing* Vasantasenā): Oh, what a lucky morning! A Brahmin from Chārudatta brings you a message, mistress.

Vasantasenā: Yes, isn't it lucky? Receive him respectfully: call the chamberlain to escort him and show them in to me.

The Maid *and* Vasantasenā *enter the house by separate entrances. The* Maid *re-emerges with the* Chamberlain; *they cross to the street gate and bow ceremoniously to* Maitreya.

Maitreya (*entering*): What do you know! Ravana, the lord of the demons, used to ride around in a magnificent chariot; and it cost him tons and tons of special prayers. I am a simple Brahmin and I don't pray much but I go around with the prettiest ladies in town.

Maid: Sir, this is the front door.

Maitreya (*admiringly*): You don't say! All spick and span, well watered; flowers on the threshold. You look up and you're in the softness of clouds; and as you look downward, you see the jasmine creeper floating down, swaying in the winds of heaven. The arch is of ivory, I see; and small glittering flags flirt with the newcomer. 'Come', their fingers beckon, 'come in, you're welcome'. On either side there are crystal flowerpots, with young mango shoots springing up. The door itself is gold-plated, diamond-studded. 'Go', it tells a poor man, "go away, what are you doing here?" But it fascinates the lover of beautiful things, even if he doesn't like them expensive.

Maid: This is the first court, sir.

Maitreya: You don't say! Balconies white as the moon, as lilies, as sea shells; the floor of precious mosaic; golden stairs, dotted with gems; the stairs lead up to pearly windows, and the windows look down on Ujjain, like round moon-faced girls. And there's the porter, snoring in an armchair, as comfortable as a Brahmin chanting mantras. Lead on, girl.

Maid: This is the second court, sir.

Maitreya: You don't say! Here fat carriage oxen, their horns glistening with oil, are having a delightful time on lumps of grass and pulse. And there's a prize specimen: a buffalo, snorting like an indignant Brahmin. And here's a ram, being massaged like a wrestler. And there are horses being groomed; and there's a monkey tied to a post like a thief; and over there an elephant breakfasting on huge balls of rice and ghee. Lead on, girl.

Maid: This is the third court, sir.

Maitreya: You don't say! Here are seats for Ujjain gay blades; a half-read book on a gambling table; dice made of gems. And there are hangers-on, the courtesans skilled in the hot and cold techniques of love. I see them lazing with pictures in their hands. Next, girl.

Maid: This is the fourth court, sir.

Maitreya: You don't say! Drums here, for feminine fingers to make a noise like murmuring clouds; and the music of the cymbals, like stars falling through space; the voice of the flute, like the humming of bees. Here is a girl plucking the vina, with excitable fingers, like a jealous flirt scratching her lover's face; and a group of girls singing—a song like the swarm of honey-drunk bees. Here some are dancing; there others are rehearsing; there still other are reciting. Grass fans swinging to send down the cool breeze. What next, girl?

Maid: This is the fifth court, sir.

Maitreya: You don't say! How my mouth waters! Such an overpowering odour of oil and spices! Out of the kitchen emerge puffs of steam, sighs from the half-open mouths of ovens kept lighted twenty-four hours a day. Delicious! Incomparable! Here the kitchen boy skins the meat, shapeless as used linen; there the pastry cook is at his magic: sweets and cakes and sauces. *Aside*. Oh, if I could just wash my feet and fall to! *Aside*. And there are courtesans and young boys. God, but isn't this heaven! And those young men—what might be their work here?

Maid: They have no fathers or mothers, sir. They live in a strange house, they earn their money from strangers, they eat strange food. But they have a nice time of it; they're as happy as baby elephants.

Maitreya: Next, girl.

Maid: This is the sixth court, sir.

Maitreya: You don't say! The gate is of gold and diamonds, the rest of sapphires; it all sparkles like a rainbow. They seem very busy here. Jewellers at work, I see: with pearls, topazes, sapphires, emeralds, rubies, coral, and lapis lazuli. Some are setting rubies in gold; some are threading gold jewellry; some are stringing pearls; some are polishing lapis lazuli, some coral; some are piercing shells. Wet bundles of saffron are being dried, sandalwood ground, perfumes mixed. Betel leaves are being served to courtesans and their lovers—flirting and laughter and drinking and merriment. And there are the scum: those who have left wife and children and fortune, and hang about for pleasure. They stand and drink—and drink. Lead on, girl.

Maid: This is the seventh court, sir.

Maitreya: Doves billing and cooing; parrots croaking like overfed Brahmins; a housemaid of a mynah ordering the servants about; a koel, throat crammed with sweet syrups,

gurgling like a water carrier. Quail fighting; partridges wailing; pigeons being teased. A peacock fans the heated walls with a glittering tail. And on this side are swans, balls of moonlight, chasing pretty girls, swinging as they go; and cranes here, like eunuchs guarding a palace. A whole zoo here, I see. Well, what next?

Maid: We shall now go to the eighth court, sir.

Maitreya: Who is that, that overdressed man in silk, stumbling as he wanders about, his body covered with superfluous ornaments?

Maid: The brother of my mistress, sir.

Maitreya: He must have done a lot of penance in his last birth to be so lucky in this! Yet he's not too happy, after all, poor fellow: a champak tree in a burial ground—fragrant but off limits. And who is that lady on that throne, with shoes on her oiled feet and wearing expensive muslin?

Maid: My mistress's mother.

Maitreya: Talk about witches having a gay time! God, what a mighty belly she has! How did she get in? Or did you first put her on the throne and then build the house around her?

Maid: Don't be impertinent. Can't you see that she is suffering from a trouble that makes her that way?

Maitreya: Oh, blessed trouble that makes her that way! Come, fall on this poor Brahmin, O blessed trouble! Favour me, favour me!

Maid: What impudence! You should die of shame before speaking like that.

Maitreya: Me die? Let the fat one die instead, let her die first, swollen with wine and age. She'll supply dinner for a thousand jackals. I had heard a lot of praise for Vasantasenā's palace, but now I can hardly believe my eyes. Is this the house of courtesan or the palace of the god of wealth? Where's your mistress?

Maid: In the garden, sir. Here.

Maitreya (*looking around*): Ah, heavenly! Trees bent under fruit, trees rich with flowers. Silk swings under the trees, just the size for a young sweet girl. Jasmine, *malati*, full-blown *mallika, sephalika* blossoms on the ground. And the pool is white as dawn, its lotuses red as suns. The asoka tree is spattered with fiery blossoms like a warrior bloodstained from battle. Perfect! Where is your mistress?

Maid: If you lowered your eyes, sir, you would see her.

Maitreya: Ah, there! (*He approaches* Vasantasenā.) I bring you greetings, lady.

Vasantasenā (*speaking in Sanskrit*): Ah, Maitreya. Please make yourself comfortable. You are very welcome here.

Maitreya (*remaining standing*): Thank you. (*He sits down only after she has done so.*)

Vasantasenā: I hope Chārudatta is well.

Maitreya: Very well, thank you.

Vasantasenā: Maitreya, do birds still find shelter under the gentle boughs of that excellent tree, whose leaves are virtues, whose roots are courage, whose flowers are honour, and whose fruit is goodness?

Maitreya (*aside*): A pretty sentence, that! *Aloud.* They do.

Vasantasenā: And what brings you here, Maitreya?

Maitreya: This: Chārudatta sends his greetings— He *joins his palms.*—and whishes—

Vasantasenā (*joining her palms*):—commands—

Maitreya: He wishes me to report that he has lost the golden box. He lost it at the gambling table, and the keeper has gone away on royal business.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): He is too proud to admit that a thief stole it. I love him all the more for that.

Maitreya: And he asks you to accept this pearl necklace in lieu of the lost box.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): Shall I tell him the truth? *She reflects; then speaks half aloud.* No. Not now.

Maitreya (*hopefully, thinking she has spoken to him*): You will not accept the necklace?

Vasantasenā: Why not, Maitreya? *She takes it and presses it to her heart, speaking aside.* The mango tree is dry, yet drops of honey fall from its branches. *Aloud.* Sir, tell Chārudatta, who is a noble gambler, that I shall call on him this evening.

Maitreya (*aside*): What for? What more does she want? *Aloud.* I will, my lady. *Aside.* And I hope that will be the end of our acquaintance! *He leaves, escorted by the chamberlain.*

Vasantasenā: Take this necklace; and come with me to Chārudatta's.

Maid: But a storm is coming up: look how dark the sky is.

Vasantasenā: Let it come. Let it rain till the world ends. How does it touch me? I am going to meet the man I love. Take this necklace, and come with me.

They both leave.

CURTAIN

ACT V

Chārudatta *is seen seated under a shelter in his garden.*

Chārudatta (*looking up*): It is going to storm. The peacocks and the swans are disturbed; so is the lover far from home. As the clouds climb, the lightning flashes briefly, and the rain spatters down, prelude to silver cascades. And the clouds keep gathering—a shoal of dolphins, a soaring of swans, a crowd of warriors, driven by the wind, cluttering the sky. *He reflects.* Maitreya should be back by now.

Maitreya (*entering by the grillwork gate*): Scheming selfish woman! Not a word, not one civil word; she just pockets the necklace. And she isn't exactly the nadir of poverty, is she? She could have said, "Maitreya, my good friend Maitreya, sit down; here are sweets for you, and a cool drink." But no, not even a miserly glass of water. Damn her! What they say is right: "There's no such thing as a lotus without a root, a goldsmith without a swindle, a village meeting without a quarrel or a courtesan without selfishness." I must tell Chārudatta to keep a safe distance

away from such women. *He sees* Chārudatta. Ah, he's out here in the garden. *He approaches*. Looks like a storm blowing up.

Chārudatta (*rising and coming forward to greet him*): So it does. It is good to see you back, Maitreya. Come in here and sit down.

Maitreya: Thanks.

Chārudatta: What news, my friend?

Maitreya: It's over, finished.

Chārudatta: Why—did she refuse to take the necklace?

Maitreya: No such luck! She greeted me with her lotus-soft palms joined very respectfully—and took the necklace.

Chārudatta: Then what did you mean by saying, "It's over, finished"?

Maitreya: A damned pretty bargain, wasn't it, giving away a fabulous necklace for a shiny gold box that a thief ran off with? What did we get out of it?

Chārudatta: Don't be silly. She trusted us. That's reward enough.

Maitreya: That isn't all. She'd tipped off her maids, and they were giggling behind my back, veiling their faces. Giggling at a Brahmin!

Please, I beg of you, keep away from her. She will destroy you. A courtesan's like a thorn in the foot: you'll have a hell of a painful time getting it out. It's a good warning that says, "Keep away from a courtesan, an elephant, an accountant, a begging monk, a snooper, a swindler, and an ass. If you don't, you're asking for trouble."

Chārudatta: What nonsense, Maitreya! I am poor—isn't that protection enough? What can she want of me? I have nothing to give her. Such women are gold diggers: no money, no love.

Maitreya (*aside*): You can't argue with a man in love. I warned him to keep clear; but, from the way he sighs and moans, that seems only to encourage him. *Aloud.* She said she would drop in this evening. She's probably looking for more than a necklace.

Chārudatta: Let her come. She will not go away unsatisfied.

Kumbhilaka, Vasantasenā's *servant*, *is seen at the gate.*

Kumbhilaka (*to himself*): What a downpour! The more it rains, the wetter I get; the wetter I get, the more I shiver. Brrr, it's a cold night outside. *He laughs suddenly.* A nice day for

a genius like me, who plays the flute and sings like a god! All I do is carry messages from Vasantasenā to Chārudatta. *He sees* Chārudatta. He's here in the garden—and that blithering fool Maitreya is with him. The garden gate's closed. I'll prod him. *He throws mud pellets at* Maitreya.

Maitreya: What's this? Lumps of mud? What am I, a man or an apple tree?

Chārudatta: Oh, it's very likely the pigeons.

Maitreya: Dirty-minded pigeons! This stick will show you! I'll bring you down, nests and all. *He starts to run at them with his staff.*

Chārudatta (*holding him back by the sacred thread*): Calm down, Maitreya. Poor little pigeons. Leave them alone.

Kumbhilaka: The blithering fool! He sees the pigeons but can't see me. Here goes another. *He throws another mud pellet.*

Maitreya (*looking up*): Another! *Seeing no pigeon overhead, he looks around him.* Oh, it's you, Kumbhilaka. Wait. *He goes and opens the gate.* Come in, come in. What brings you here?

Kumbhilaka (*entering*): Thank you, sir.

Maitreya: Well, what brings you here, in spite of the wind and rain?

Kumbhilaka: She sent me.

Maitreya: She? Who? Who?

Kumbhilaka: She. See? She.

Maitreya: What's all this she-she-she-ing about, you clod, you wheezy beggar? Who? Who? Who?

Kumbhilaka: What's all this who-who-who-ing about, you frightened owl of a fool?

Maitreya: Come, man, let's talk sense.

Kumbhilaka: First, a riddle for you.

Maitreya: And a box on the ears for you.

Kumbhilaka: If you solve it. Here it is. In what season does the mango tree blossom?

Maitreya: That's easy. In summer.

Kumbhilaka (*grinning*): Wrong.

Maitreya (*reflecting*): Wait. I'll ask Chārudatta. *He goes over to* Chārudatta. Sir, when does the mango tree blossom?

Chārudatta: In spring, of course, in *vasanta*.

Maitreya (*returning to* Kumbhilaka): In spring, of course, in *vasanta*.

Kumbhilaka: That's it. Now another. Who protects the cities?

Maitreya: The town guard, of course.

Kumbhilaka (*grinning*): Wrong.

Maitreya (*calling to* Chārudatta): Sir, who guards the cities?

Chārudatta: The army, of course, the *sena*.

Maitreya (*to* Kumbhilaka): The army, of course, the *sena*.

Kumbhilaka: That's it. Now, quick, quick, put the two together.

Maitreya: *Sena*, army. *Vasanta*, spring. Sena-vasanta!

Kumbhilaka: No, no, the other way round.

Maitreya (*pivoting around*): Sena-vasanta.

Kumbhilaka: Idiot! Clod! Moron! Turn the stems around!

Maitreya (*turning his feet in*) Sena-vasanta!

Kumbhilaka: No! The words! Turn the *words* around!

Maitreya (*after deep reflection*): Vasanta-sena.

Kumbhilaka: Right. She's here.

Maitreya: I must tell Chārudatta. *He goes to* Chārudatta. Sir, a creditor's here.

Chārudatta: A creditor? In my house?

Maitreya: Not in the house—at the door. Vasantasenā is here.

Chārudatta: No!

Maitreya: Kumbhilaka says so. Hey, Kumbhilaka! Come here.

Kumbhilaka (*approaching*): Sir, I bring you greetings.

Chārudatta: Is Vasantasenā really here?

Kumbhilaka: Yes, sir.

Chārudatta (*joyfully*): You are a bringer of good news. Take this: it's my gift to you. *He gives* Kumbhilaka *his shawl.*

Kumbhilaka: Yes sir. *He goes out to inform* Vasantasenā.

Maitreya: There you are. There's only one reason why she comes out on a foul night like this.

Chārudatta: What's that?

Maitreya: Oh, I can tell. She thinks the necklace isn't worth the price of the casket and she wants more. Take my word for it.

Chārudatta (*aside*): She will get what she comes for.

Vasantasenā *enters, beautifully dressed as a woman who goes to meet her lover. She is accompanied by a courtier and a maid with an umbrella.*

Chārudatta: Welcome her in.

Maitreya (*approaching Vasantasenā respectfully*): We are honoured to receive you.

Vasantasenā: You flatter me. Thank you. *To the* Courtier. Sir, the maid will attend you with the umbrella.

Courtier (*aside*): I can take a hint. *Aloud.* No, thank you. *He leaves.*

Vasantasenā: Now, Maitreya, where is the good gambler?

Maitreya (*aside*): "Good gambler"! A nice way to begin. *Aloud.* Over there, madam, in the dry garden.

Vasantasenā: Dry? How is that?

Maitreya: Nothing to eat or drink. Vasantasenā *smiles.* Please come in.

Vasantasenā (*aside to the* Maid): What shall I say? How shall I begin?

Maid (*aside to* Vasantasenā): "Good evening. Sir Gambler."

Vasantasenā (*aside*): I can't. I shouldn't dare.

Maid (*aside*): Don't worry. You will at the right time.

Maitreya: Please come in. This way.

Vasantasenā (*entering and playfully throwing a flower at* Chārudatta): Good evening, Sir Gambler.

Chārudatta (*rising*): Vasantasenā! It is so good to see you. Believe me, I have been most unhappy. Please sit down. No, here.

Maitreya: Here.

Vasantasenā *sits down; then the others.*

Chārudatta: But you are dripping wet, Vasantasenā. I can see the drops trickling down from flower in your ear. Maitreya, bring her a new dress: she should change into something dry.

Maitreya *looks at one of* Chārudatta's *maids.*

Maid: No, wait, Maitreya. I'll go. *She goes to get the dress.*

Maitreya (*aside to* Chārudatta): May I ask her a question?

Chārudatta: Of course.

Maitreya: Why do you come here, madam, at this time of night—a night so dark, moonless, windy, and raining?

Maid (*aside*): The cheek of him!

Vasantasenā (*aside*): No, he's just being careful.

Maid: My mistress has come to inquire the value of the pearl necklace given to her.

Maitreya (*aside to* Chārudatta): Didn't I say so? She wants something better.

Maid: You see, she gambled it away. And now the keeper of the gambling house has left on royal business, so she can't find out what it's really worth.

Maitreya (*aside*): Tit for tat. I've heard that before.

Maid: In the meantime, while we're searching for him, my mistress asks you please to accept this gold box. *She shows the box.* Maitreya *looks at it sharply.* Sir, you are examining it very closely. Have you seen it before?

Maitreya: No, but it's a real work of art. Very pretty.

Maid: You aren't very sharp. It's the same gold box.

Maitreya (*joyfully*): It is! Chārudatta, here's the gold box that the thief carried away from our house.

Chārudatta: The trick we played on her is now being played back on us, I can't believe it. The box may look the same, but it can't be.

Maitreya: But it is. As I am a Brahmin, it is the very same box.

Chārudatta: If true, this is splendid news.

Maitreya (*aside to* Chārudatta): Shall I ask where they found it?

Chārudatta (*aside to* Maitreya): A reasonable question. Do.

Maitreya (*whispering in the Maid's ear*): So... pss... pss...

Maid (*whispering in* Maitreya's *ear*): So... pss... pss...

Chārudatta: What is it? Why not tell us?

Maitreya (*whispering in* Chārudatta's *ear*): So... pss... pss... pss...

Chārudatta (*to the* Maid): So this is the same gold box.

Maid: Yes, sir.

Chārudatta: That is good news. Here, take this ring from me: it's for you. *He feels his finger, finds there is no ring, and is extremely embarrassed.*

Vasantasenā (*aside*): How lovable he is.

Chārudatta (*aside to* Maitreya): What's the use of living, Maitreya, if a man has no money at all? His anger is futile; his love is futile. Birds without wings, pools without water, trees without leaves, snakes without venom—such are the poor.

Maitreya (*aside to* Chārudatta): But you mustn't take it so seriously. *Aloud, laughingly.* And

I should like, madam, to get back my towel in which the box was wrapped when the thief took it.

Vasantasenā (*ignoring him*): It was not right of you, Chārudatta, to send this pearl necklace in place of the stolen box. You think very poorly of me to have done so.

Chārudatta: Who would have believed the truth? The world is merciless to the poor.

Maitreya (*to the* Maid): And you—are you going to spend the night here?

Maid: That's not very polite, sir.

Maitreya (*to* Chārudatta): The storm has started again, and the rain is simply tumbling down.

Chārudatta: How well you put it.

The rains pierce through the clouds, as lotus roots
Pierce the soil, softly, as if
Weeping for the absent moon.
My dearest, look at the sky, black-haired, scented with wind.
The lightning scoops her into his arms,
Tenderly but fiercely, as lover does lover.

Vasantasenā (*unable to control her feelings, embraces him.* Chārudatta *puts his arms around her*):

Let the clouds alone, Maitreya.
Let it rain a hundred years,
A hundred years of thunder, a hundred of lightning.
They are my friends:
They have given me my love.
My love is in my arms.
Happy is he who embraces his love in the rain.
Vasantasenā, dearest, the door creaks,
The walls are miserably wet;
The mortar is cracked, the roof will leak—
Nothing will last.
Oh, see the tongue of lightning licking the yawning sky!

But now look, look at the rainbow!
See how its arms rise in holy prayer!
Now it is time to sleep.
Sleep will come sweeter with these pebbly drops
Splattering on palm leaves, falling on brooks;
Like a lute, and a voice singing,
Like a lute—the rain, and the music of the rain.

CURTAIN

ACT VI

A room in Chārudatta's *house.* Vasantasenā's Maid *enters.*

Maid: Not awake yet? It's time she was up. I must wake her. *She sees* Vasantasenā *coming, rubbing her eyes.* It's morning, mistress.

Vasantasenā: So soon? Is the sun up?

Maid: It's certainly up for us.

Vasantasenā: And where is our excellent gambler?

Maid: He rose, gave Vardhamanaka his orders and went to the Pushpakaranda flower garden.

Vasantasenā: Did he leave any message?

Maid: He told Vardhamanaka to have the carriage ready before dawn. He said to take you—

Vasantasenā: Where?

Maid: To join him in the garden.

Vasantasenā (*embracing her*): Last night I hardly got a good look at his face. Now I shall see him to my heart's content. Tell me, did I enter the inner court last night?

Maid: Not only the inner court but into everyone's heart.

Vasantasenā: His people must be worried.

Maid: They will be.

Vasantasenā, When?

Maid: When you leave.

Vasantasenā: Then my worries will begin. *She speaks sweetly.* Here, take this pearl necklace and give it to my good sister, his wife. Tell her from me: "I admire Chārudatta, therefore I admire you too. I send you these pearls: they are yours; they look prettier on you."

Maid: But Chārudatta won't like that.

Vasantasenā: That isn't worry. Do as I tell you.

The Maid *goes inside and returns promptly.*

Maid: She says: "My husband gave the necklace to you. It is yours. It is not proper for me to take it back. Besides, the only ornament I value is my husband."

Radanika *enters*, *with* Chārudatta's *son*, Rohasena.

Radanika: Won't you give me a ride on your toy cart?

Rohasena (*irritably*): No. I don't want this toy cart. I don't want a clay cart. I want a gold cart.

Radanika (*exasperated*): Gold at your age! When we have plenty of money, we'll buy you a

gold cart. Meanwhile, isn't this a sweet cart? Oh, look, there's Vasantasenā. Say good morning.

Vasantasenā: Radanika. How nice to see you. Oh, what a sweet child. Who is he? *Isn't* he sweet? But he's so badly dressed.

Radanika: This is Rohasena. Chārudatta's son.

Vasantasenā: Oh, how nice! Come, young man, put your arms around me. *She takes him on her lap: he begins to cry quietly.* Why, he's just like his father!

Radanika: And *good*, like his father. Chārudatta loves him more than anything in the world.

Vasantasenā: But why is he crying?

Radanika: Well, the neighbour's son was given a gold toy cart; and Rohasena liked it and wanted it. I made him this clay one; but he says he doesn't like it, he wants one made of gold.

Vasantasenā (*aside*): How sad, that a little boy should suffer because others are rich. *She represses a sob.* Don't cry, young man: you shall have a gold cart.

Rohasena: Who are you?

Vasantasenā: I came to see your father.

Radanika: She is a friend of your mother, Rohasena.

Rohasena: She can't be: she wears so many gold things. Mother doesn't.

Vasantasenā (*sobbing and removing her ornaments*): There. Now I'm your mother's friend. Take these and buy a gold cart for yourself.

Rohasena, No, I won't. Because you're crying.

Vasantasenā (*wiping her eyes*): No, I'm not. See? *She fills the clay cart with her ornaments.* There, go get a gold cart.

Radanika *and* Rohasena *leave by the street gate, and meet* Vardhamanaka, *pulling up in an ox-carriage.*

Vardhamanaka: Radanika, tell her the carriage is ready.

Radanika (*re-entering the house*): Vardhamanaka is here and says the carriage is ready.

Vasantasenā: Tell him I'll be coming in a minute.

Radanika (*shouting to* Vardhamanaka): Wait a little, Vardhamanaka.

Vardhamanaka (*looking into the back of the carriage*): Damn, I've left the cushions behind! I'll have to go back and get them.

But these beasts are too jumpy to be left alone. Oh, I'll be back in a jiffy. *He drives away.*

Vasantasenā (*to her own maid*): Just get me my outer things; I'll put them on myself.

Sthavaraka, Sansthanaka's *servant*, *drives his carriage into the square outside.*

Sthavaraka: What a jam! And Sansthanaka has ordered me to take the carriage to the Pushpakaranda flower garden and to be quick about it! Giddap! Giddap! *The carriage advances a little, and he stands up to look around.* A real traffic jam: village carts everywhere. What now? *He shouts.* Hey, you! Make room! Move over, move over! Who am *I?* Me? Sir, it may interest you to know that I am the driver of Sansthanaka, the king's own brother-in-law. Move *over*, move! Make room, there! Pull to the left, you! *He looks up ahead.* Why, there's someone running as if the devil was at his heels. Probably a welshing gambler. Who can he be? There, he's lost in crowd. It's none of my business anyway. Hey, you village touts, get a move on! I don't care if you're bogged down. What, give you a hand? *Me*, give you a hand? The driver of Sansthanaka give *you* a hand? All right, all

right, just one little push. I'll stop here, in front of Chārudatta's garden gate. *He jumps down and goes to help, leaving the carriage at the door.*

Maid: That must have been the carriage driving up: I heard the wheels.

Vasantasenā: I feel nervous. See me to the gate.

Maid: This way, mistress.

Vasantasenā: That will do. Now go and rest.

Maid: Thank you. *She leaves.*

Vasantasenā (*passing through the gate and getting into* Sansthanaka's *carriage*): Why should my right eye twitch? It's a bad omen. But what does it matter? Meeting Chārudatta will cancel all bad omens.

Sthavaraka (*returning*): There, the road's clear now. Off I go. *He climbs up and drives off, speaking to himself.* Why does the carriage feel heavier? Or am I just tired from helping them with the bogged wheels? Giddap! Giddap! Move on, my beauties!

Voice (*offstage*): Police! Police! The traitor is loose! The jailer is killed! All guards at their posts! The traitor is loose!

Āryaka *dashes frantically out of the crowd, dragging the chains on his feet, and concealing his face with his hands.*

Sthavaraka: There's going to be trouble here. I'd better clear out while there's time. *He drives the carriage rapidly off.*

Āryaka (*to himself*): It's behind me, that terrible sea of jail and suffering—all on account of the tyrannous Palaka. Thank God. It's worth it, even if I must drag these broken ankle chains along wherever I go. Thanks, Sharvilaka: you're the one who got me out. What shame! Snatched away from my house, shoved into a dingy cell, left to die—all because a trembling king is afraid of an astrologer's words! *He raises his voice.* What did I do? What did I do to deserve this, to be treated as a wild beast? If the stars said something, is that my fault? Can I fight fate? Can I change fate? *He looks around.* Here's a gate left ajar. Some kind man doesn't believe in locks. The hinges are rusted; fate's not been kind to this man either. I'll slip in.

Vardhamanaka's voice (*off stage*): Giddap! Giddap!

Āryaka (*pausing at the gate*): A carriage! If it's a rich man's carriage returning empty from town, or some noble lady's, or even a bunch of villagers—this is the thing for me!

Vardhamanaka *re-enters*, *driving* Chārudatta's *ox-carriage.*

Vardhamanaka: There, now I have the cushions. *He calls.* Radanika, tell Vasantasenā the carriage is waiting to take her to the Pushpakaranda flower garden.

Āryaka: A courtesan's carriage going out of the city! I'm lucky. *He approaches slowly.*

Vardhamanaka (*hearing the sound of* Āryaka's *broken ankle chains*): The tinkling of anklets! That must be her. I have to manage these oxen, mistress: please get in at the back. Āryaka *climbs in.* There, the carriage slumps to the right with more weight. Giddap, you lazy lumps, giddap! *He starts to drive off.*

Viraka, *a captain of the guard, enters, with guards.*

Viraka: Here, all of you! You, Jaya, you, Jayamana, Mangala, Pushpabhadra! Jump to it, my fine fellows—there's no time to waste. The traitor cowherd is loose: the king can't sleep any more. You, take the east gate; you, the west; you, the south; you, the north. I'll climb this old wall here and look around. *He calls.* Chandanaka, follow me!

Chandanaka, *another captain, enters, with more guards.*

Chandanaka: Viraka, Vishalya, come on! Dandalaka, Dandashura, Bhimangada, come on! Hop to it!—or the old king will be out and a new king in. Search the streets, the

roads, the gardens, the houses, the markets, the shops—leave not one stone unturned! Where will he escape as long as Chandanaka lives?

Viraka: Well, the bird's been flown since dawn. And he has many friends outside.

Vardhamanaka: Giddap! Giddap!

Chandanaka (*seeing the carriage*): What's this doing here? A covered carriage—mighty suspicious! Search it.

Viraka: Stop, you! Whose carriage is this? Who's inside? Where are you going?

Vardhamanaka: Chārudatta's carriage, Sir. I am taking mistress Vasantasenā, who is inside, to meet Chārudatta in the Pushpakaranda flower garden.

Viraka (*to* Chandanaka): He says it belongs to Chārudatta; Vasantasenā is inside it, and he's ṭaking her to Pushpakaranda.

Chandanaka: He may pass.

Viraka: You mean without a search?

Chandanaka: Without a search.

Viraka: Why?

Chandanaka: It's Chārudatta's.

Viraka: And who is Chārudatta, who is Vasantasenā, that this carriage shall pass without being searched?

Chandanaka: You haven't heard of Chārudatta? Not even of Vasantasenā? My poor man, haven't you heard of the moon, of moonlight? They are the finest citizens in our noble Ujjain.

Viraka: That's all very well, but I have my duty to do. My own father can't pass here without a proper search.

Chandanaka: If that's the way you feel, go ahead.

Viraka: Oh, you look in.

Chandanaka *climbs up the back of the carriage, peers in, and finds* Āryaka.

Āryaka: Please, don't give me away.

Chandanaka: You have my word, Āryaka. *Aside.* Trapped like a poor bird. But I know he isn't guilty. Besides he's Sharvilaka's friend, and Sharvilaka saved my life once. I'll die for them—and happily too—if I have to. *He gets down; then speaks to* Viraka. I'm afraid that he—I mean, she, Vasantasenā—thinks it highly improper to insult her in this fashion on the royal road.

Viraka: He—she—does, eh?

Chandanaka: That's what I said.

Viraka: I don't like this "he-she" shuffling, my friend.

Chandanaka: Are you mad? Can't a man make a slip of the tongue, like any honest person?

Viraka: Can't a second honest person take a look too? The king has ordered it. I obey the king.

Chandanaka: You mean I don't obey the king?

Viraka: The king has ordered a general search.

Chandanaka (*aside*): If the king is told that Āryaka was hiding in Chārudatta's carriage, Chārudatta will have quite a job of explaining to do. I'll give Viraka a dose of South Indian rhetoric. *Aloud.* Viraka, I have searched the carriage, and now you tell me you're going to search it again? As my name is Chandanaka, and as I stand here, what the devil does this mean? Who are you, sir, to challenge my competence?

Viraka: Damn and blast! And who are *you,* sir, may I ask?

Chandanaka: A person of eminence, worthy of your respect. You are low-caste.

Viraka: Low-caste? *My* family, low-caste!

Chandanaka: The less said about it, the better.

Viraka: Say it!

Chandanaka: Oh, what's the use? It wouldn't help.
You can't restore a rotten apple.

Viraka: Go on, say it!

Chandanaka *makes a gesture to show that* viraka *is a leather-stitcher.*

Chandanaka: Didn't you deal in dead skins? Stitch flesh and bones? Cut tough skins—*He gestures.*—like this, and this, and this? And now you're a captain! A captain of the king!

Viraka: A nice caste you come from, Chandanaka! Or have you forgotten?

Chandanaka: Forgotten what? I'm as pure as the moon.

Viraka: Let's forget such things, shall we?

Chandanaka: Go on, say it! What?

Viraka: Pure as the moon! Your father was a drum, your mother was a kettledrum, your brother is a tambourine. You—a captain, a captain of the king! Bah!

Chandanaka (*losing his temper*): I, a tanner? Chandanaka, a tanner? All right, go on, go on and search the carriage!

Viraka: Hey, you! Driver! Wait! I will search it!

Act VI

As Viraka *starts to climb into the carriage,*
Chandanaka *grabs him by the hair, pulls*
him down and kicks him.

Viraka (*rising; speaking violently*): You bloody swine! What does this mean? I was only doing my duty. Why, I'll have you dragged into court and whipped. My name's not Viraka if I don't; Viraka doesn't forget so easily. You'll see. *He leaves.*

Chandanaka (*shouting after him*): Run to the palace, run to the court, you dog. Run with your tail between your legs. Who cares? *To* Vardhamanaka. Drive on, quick. If anyone stops you, say that Viraka and Chandanaka have already searched the carriage. *To* Āryaka. My lady Vasantasenā, a passport for you. *He hands over his sword to* Āryaka.

Āryaka: Thanks, friend. This brings my courage back. I'm safe now.

Chandanaka: Remember me, sir—my name is Chandanaka. I speak from love, not selfishness.

Āryaka: I shall indeed. Fate sent you to me, my friend. If everything turns out right, I'll remember you very specially.

Chandanaka: God give you courage and luck, sir. Vardhamanaka *drives the carriage off;*

Chandanaka *stands gazing after it, his back to the audience.* I see my friend Sharvilaka following at a discreet distance. Good! I had better tell my family to join him, too: Viraka is no doubt up to mischief behind my back.

He leaves.

CURTAIN

ACT VII

Chārudatta *and* Maitreya *are seen walking in the Pushpakaranda flower garden.*

Maitreya: Such a lovely garden.

Chārudatta: Yes, pretty as a market: here are the trees, small shopkeepers with glittering things; and the bees, like the king's officers, busily collecting taxes.

Maitreya: This is a nice stone seat. *He motions* Chārudatta *to sit on it,*

Chārudatta (*sitting down*): Vardhamanaka takes his own time, doesn't he?

Maitreya: I told him to hurry.

Chārudatta: Why does he take so long then? Is the carriage too heavy for the oxen? Did a wheel break? A tree fall across the road? Did he lose his way?

Vardhamanaka *enters, driving the carriage in which* Āryaka *is hiding.*

Vardhamanaka: Giddap, you!

Āryaka (*aside*): Safe for the time being. But what next? Here I am, in a stranger's carriage, like a koel's eggs in a crow's nest. But the

chains are still on my legs, and the king's spies are everywhere. At least I'm far outside the city. Shall I hide here in this garden? Or shall I wait till the owner of the carriage comes and appeal to him? They say Chārudatta is a fine man and always ready to help. I'll wait till he comes. It will help me to meet him and talk to him.

Vardhamanaka: Here we are. Ho, Maitreya!

Maitreya: That's the voice of our friend Vardhamanaka. Vasantasenā is here.

Chārudatta: Welcome her to the garden.

Maitreya (*going to the gate*): And why are you so filthy late, Vardhamanaka?

Vardhamanaka: Now don't lose your temper Maitreya. I had to go back for the cushions that I'd left behind.

Chārudatta: It's all right. Maitreya, help her down.

Maitreya (*aside*): Does she have chains on her feet so that she can't get down by herself? *He lifts the curtain of the carriage door.* This isn't mistress Vasantasenā! It's mister Vasantasenā!

Chārudatta: What a time to choose for joking, Maitreya! Here, let me help her. *He rises and approaches.*

Āryaka (*aside*): That's the man. He not only is noble; he looks every inch a good man. I'm safe.

Chārudatta (*seeing* Āryaka): A man! Strong, brawny, fierce-eyed. Why that chain on his feet? Sir, who are you?

Āryaka: Āryaka, a herdsman. I need your help.

Chārudatta: The same Āryaka whom the king arrested out of fear?

Āryaka: Yes.

Chārudatta: You are welcome to my help. Fate has brought you here, so I cannot refuse you. Vardhamanaka, remove that chain.

Vardhamanaka (*doing so*): It's quickly done, sir.

Āryaka: Now I am bound to you by a stronger chain.

Maitreya: And now, away with you! Now he's free, our work is over. Shall we go?

Chārudatta: You should be ashamed of yourself, Maitreya.

Āryaka: Chārudatta, you must forgive me: I made use of your carriage without your permission.

Chārudatta: I am glad you behaved informally.

Āryaka: I thank you for your kindness, and, with your permission, I should like to leave.

Chārudatta: You have my permission. *He watches* Āryaka *get down from the carriage*. But you can't go on foot, sir: you're cramped and tired. Besides, if you go in the carriage, you need not fear: no one will suspect you. You had better keep the carriage.

Āryaka: Thank you.

Chārudatta: And you have my best wishes for the journey to your friends.

Āryaka: I am leaving a good friend behind.

Chārudatta: If you need me again, you are welcome.

Āryaka: I'll keep that in mind.

Chārudatta: And God be with you.

Āryaka: As you were with me.

Chārudatta: It was nothing. Forget it. Fate stepped in.

Āryaka: And chose you as an agent.

Chārudatta: Don't waste time. There are spies and soldiers everywhere. You must hurry to your friends.

Āryaka (*getting in again*): We shall meet again. Until then, good-bye.

Vardhamanaka *drives him off in the carriage.*

Chārudatta: Now *I'm* not safe from the king's anger, either. Even walls have eyes. Throw this chain in the well, Maitreya. Maitreya *goes to do so*; Chārudatta's *left eye twitches; he speaks aside.* A twitching eye's a bad omen. I did want to see her. But it won't be today, I fear. *To* Maitreya, *returning.* Let's go, Maitreya. *He stops.* Oh, a Buddhist monk coming this way. Another bad omen! *He turns to* Maitreya. Let's take this other path, Maitreya; I want to avoid him.

They leave.

CURTAIN

ACT VIII

A Buddhist monk (the ex-masseur) enters Sansthanaka's garden, carrying a wet robe.

Monk: Collect virtue, my friends.

Be moderate, be frugal. Meditate.
The five senses are thieves.
Keep an eye on the senses,
Beware of the senses,
Stealers of virtue, stealers of faith.
For all things pass. Only virtue remains.

Kill the five senses.
Knock out the ego, cast off ignorance.
Make the flesh pure,
And heaven is yours.
For all things pass. Only virtue remains.

Some shave the head, some the chin.
But the cancer's in the mind: the knife must turn inward.
Be cleansed of lust and cleansed of pride;
Leave head alone, leave chin alone.
Collect virtue, my friends.
For all things pass. Only virtue remains.

I have dyed this robe saffron. Now to rinse it in the pool. It's the garden of the king's brother-in-law; but I shan't take long. *He begins to rinse the robe.*

Voice (*offstage*): Stop, you rascal! What are you doing there?

Monk (*fearfully*): Here he comes—Sansthanaka himself! God help me! He hates all monks just because one rubbed him the wrong way once. So he seizes them, pierces their noses like bullocks', and sends them packing. What shall I do? The Lord Buddha is my refuge.

A Courtier *enters, brandishing a sword, followed by* Sansthanaka.

Sansthanaka: You bastardly monk, stop it! Stop it before I make radish jelly out of you! *He strikes the monk.*

Courtier: Don't be a fool. Can't you see his yellow robe? He's a monk. Forget him. Look at the garden: it opens out like a feast before our eyes.

Monk: Oh, thank you, my lord, my savior.

Sansthanaka: The rascal! He's insulting me.

Courtier: Why, what has he done?

Sansthanaka: He called me a "shaver."

Courtier: No, he was praising you. He said "savior."

Sansthanaka: Praise me more, monk, praise me more. But why are you here?

Monk: I was rinsing this robe, sir.

Sansthanaka: Was this pool meant for washing clothes, you rascal? My sister's husband gave it to me. But who comes here? Just dogs and jackals and monks washing robes! I don't even dare to have a bath here. One good clout should finish you off.

Courtier: Leave him alone. He seems to be a neophyte: he's just joined the monks.

Sansthanaka: I don't think so.

Courtier: Look at his head: it's freshly shaven. He's hardly worn that rough robe: no scars on his body. It fits him loosely, too; you can see he doesn't feel at home in it.

Monk: Yes, I have only recently joined.

Sansthanaka: And why? Why not all your life, you poseur, you fraud? *He strikes the monk repeatedly.*

Monk: Glory to the Buddha!

Courtier: Stop it. Let him be. Let him go.

Sansthanaka: Wait. I must consult—

Courtier: Who's here to consult?

Sansthanaka: Me. I must consult myself. My heart.

Courtier (*aside*): why doesn't the silly fool run away?

Sansthanaka: Let's see. Dear heart, sweet palpitating heart, little chit of a heart, shall I let him go? *To himself.* Neither. *Aloud.* I have consulted my heart, and my heart says—

Courtier: At last!

Sansthanaka: My heart says: he must not be allowed to go, and he must not be allowed to remain here. He shall neither breathe in nor breathe out. He shall fall on his face here—and die. Expire.

Monk: Glory to the Buddha! Mercy, my lord!

Courtier: Let him go.

Sansthanaka: On one condition.

Courtier: What?

Sansthanaka: Let him throw mud in the pool without spoiling the water. Or, let him take mud from the bottom of the pool without spoiling the water. That's good, eh?

Courtier (*aside*): The world's packed with fools. *Aloud.* How can he do that? It's impossible.

The Monk *makes faces at* Sansthanaka.

Sansthanaka: What's he doing?

Courtier: He's praising you. That's a Buddhist blessing.

Sansthanaka: Praise me more, monk. Praise me more.

The monk gesticulates and hurries off.

Courtier (*quickly*): Just look at the lovely garden now, so well guarded by watchmen. Those creepers around those trees, so lovingly embracing them—like a wife meeting her husband.

Sansthanaka: And the Pound is full of flowers, the trees heavy with fruits, the creepers busily climbing and the monkeys bobbing like jack fruit.

Courtier: Sit here on this stone seat.

Sansthanaka: I will. *They sit down and relax.* You know something? I can't forget Vasantasenā. It's like when a man abuses you; you can't forget it, can you?

Courtier (*aside*): *You* can't, of course. A sex fiend can't take no from a woman; a normal man is hurt, but once it's over, it's over.

Sansthanaka: Why does that devil of a driver of mine take so long? I told him to get here in record time. The sun's up, at high noon, and splutters like an angry ape. I'm footsore and hungry, and I can't walk in this heat.

Courtier: It *is hot.* The cows are keeping to the shadows; here and there a deer is looking

for a pool—even if it's only hot water that he'll find. There's not a man out on the streets. The driver must have taken a longer but cooler route.

Sansthanaka: That's very kind of him, while the sun here is roasting me brown. The birds are hidden in the cool leaves, but we pant here like furnaces. I bet you he's taking his time. Well, how about a song to make the time pass? *He sings.* Wasn't that brilliant?

Courtier: Wasn't it? You sing like an angel.

Sansthanaka: Naturally. Pepper and powder, oil and ghee—that's my daily recipe for a sweet voice. Damn it. the man's still not here!

Courtier: He'll be here soon.

Sthavaraka *drives up before the gate with the carriage containing* Vasantasenā.

Sthavaraka: Giddap, you two! I'm late; it's past noon. I hope he doesn't blow up.

Vasantasenā (*within*): That isn't Vardhamanaka's voice. Did Chārudatta send another driver? My right eye twitches. I suddenly feel faint. Where am I? I can't see clearly.

Sansthanaka (*approaching*): So, you are here at last!

Courtier (*approaching*): About time, too!

Sansthanaka: I heard the wheels squeal like pigs. Hello, Sthavaraka. Good to see you.

Sthavaraka: Sir?

Sansthanaka: Good to see the carriage, too.

Sthavaraka: Sir.

Sansthanaka: And these two beasts.

Sthavaraka: Sir?

Sansthanaka: And you.

Sthavaraka: Sir?

Sansthanaka: Drive in, man, drive in!

Sthavaraka: Sir?

Sansthanaka: This way, you fool, where the wall's broken down.

Sthavaraka: It can't be done: the opening's too narrow. The carriage will be smashed, the oxen will be killed. I'll be killed.

Sansthanaka: If the carriage is smashed, I'll get another one made. If the oxen are killed, I'll buy two more. And if you die, I'll get another driver.

Sthavaraka: Yes, sir. You will have another driver, but I shall be dead.

Sansthanaka: No back talk, you idiot! Drive! Drive! Let the whole thing crash!

Sthavaraka: As you say, sir. Here goes. Drive in, my carriage, my friend—it's your funeral—and mine. *He drives through the narrow opening*. We made it! We're lucky, sir.

Sansthanaka: Nothing wrong? The oxen all right? The ropes all right? You all right?

Sthavaraka: Yes, sir.

Sansthanaka: Good! I like you, you know, and admire you. *To the* Courtier. Let's get in and see if the inside of the carriage is all right too.

Courtier: Yes. *He starts to get in.*

Sansthanaka (*pulling him back*): Me first, my friend. This isn't your father's carriage. I am the owner. I get in first.

Courtier: But you asked me to do so.

Sansthanaka: So what? Haven't you the politeness to say, "Sir, after you"?

Courtier: After you, sir

Sansthanaka: That's a good boy. *He gets up and looks in, backs out in a great fright, and falls on the* Courtier. Help, thief! Help, witch! A thief in the carriage! A witch in the carriage!

Courtier: Don't be silly. What would a witch be doing in a carriage? You've had a touch of

the sun. It was just Sthavaraka's shadow that gave you the jimjams.

Sansthanaka: Sthavaraka, Sthavaraka, are you still alive?

Sthavaraka: Yes, sir.

Sansthanaka: Take a look in the carriage. I tell you there's a woman inside!

Courtier: A woman!

Vasantasenā *(frightened, to herself)*: It's.

Sansthanaka: What shall I do? Fate has deceived me.

Sansthanaka: Hey, you rascal, didn't I tell you to look in? *To the* Courtier. Come.

Courtier: A woman can do no harm. *He puts his head inside the carriage.* Vasantasenā? No! The deer follows the tiger. The swan runs after the crow. *To* Vasantasenā. That you should do this, Vasantasenā! I should never have believed it. First your pride says no, and now, for the sake of money, because your mother tells you—

Vasantasenā (*shaking her head violently*): No!

Courtier: You are a courtesan, after all.

Vasantasenā: It's all a mistake. This is not the carriage—please help me, please—

Courtier: Since you ask me. Leave everything to me. *He withdraws his head and turns to* Sansthanaka. Yes, there's a witch inside.

Sansthanaka: Why didn't she eat you up?

Courtier: Thank God, she spared me. How about a nice pleasant walk back to Ujjain under the shady roadside trees?

Sansthanaka: Well...

Courtier: It's good exercise. And the oxen could do with a bit of rest.

Sansthanaka: Let's go. You, Sthavaraka, follow us with the carriage. Wait, let's see… I go on foot only before gods and Brahmins. The carriage suits me best. People will see me from afar and say, "There he is, the king's brother-in-law."

Courtier (*aside*): That does it. What now? I hope this help, *Aloud.* There wasn't any witch: I was joking. It's Vasantasenā. She has come to see you.

Vasantasenā (*to herself*): Oh, no!

Sansthanaka: And why shouldn't she? I'm a first-class nobleman, am I not?

Courtier: Yes.

Sansthanaka: What luck! What wonderful luck! The last time, I made her angry. This time,

I'll fall down before her and ask her forgiveness.

Courtier: An excellent idea.

Sansthanaka: Watch me. *He approaches and kneels before* Vasantasenā. Listen to me, my mother, dear mother. My lotus hands supplicate you in prayer. Please forgive the mistakes I made in the past. Yours sincerely, your lover, your slave.

Vasantasenā (*angrily*): Go away. You insult me. *She spurns him with her foot.*

Sansthanaka (*rising*): What! Kick this head? Sansthanaka's head that does not bow even to gods? And you kick it the way jackals kick rotting flesh? Hey, Sthavaraka, where did you pick this woman up?

Sthavaraka: The road was blocked, sir. I stopped near Chārudatta's garden gate while the traffic cleared. I was helping to get a villager's cart unmired. I think she must have got in then, thinking it was her carrriage.

Sansthanaka: I see! She *wasn't* coming to meet me. Get out, you! This is my carriage. You were going to meet that beggar Brahmin, weren't you? Not in my carriage, you don't! Get out, get out!

Vasantasenā: Yes, I was going to meet Chārudatta. And I am proud of it.

Sansthanaka: How I always wanted to lay hands on your lovely body. Now I'll drag you down by the hair, my sweet beauty.

Courtier: This is no time to insult a lady. Come down, Vasantasenā. *He helps her to alight. She stands at a little distance from them.*

Sansthanaka (*aside*): First she refused me. Now she kicks me. Fire is in my heart! She'll die for this! *Aloud, to the* Courtier. And you now, what would you like? A brilliant gold mantle with a hundred tassels? A taste of the most delicious bit of bird's meat you ever had in your life? Tell me, what do you want most?

Courtier: Why?

Sansthanaka: Do me a favour.

Courtier: I'll do anything for you—within reason.

Sansthanaka: Oh, wonderfully reasonable, most wonderfully reasonable, I promise you!

Courtier: What?

Sansthanaka: Kill Vasantasenā.

Courtier (*shocked*): The finest lady in Ujjain, a most blameless courtesan, refined,

beautiful—kill her? My soul would forever rot in hell.

Sansthanaka: I'll take care of your soul. If you kill her in this lonely garden, who will ever know?

Courtier: The sky, the gods, the wind, the moon, the big-eyed sun, my heart, my conscience. The whole world will know. *I* shall know.

Sansthanaka: That's too bad. Hide her then, and kill her.

Courtier: You mad fool!

Sansthanaka: You're afraid of the gods. You're a poor jackal. Sthavaraka will do it. *He calls him over*. Sthavaraka, my man, do you want gold bracelets?

Sthavaraka: I'll wear gold bracelets.

Sansthanaka: Sthavaraka, my man, do you want a golden couch?

Sthavaraka: I'll sit on a golden couch.

Sansthanaka: Sthavaraka, my man, do you want delicious dishes?

Sthavaraka: I'll eat delicious dishes.

Sansthanaka: Sthavaraka, my man, do you want to boss my slaves?

Sthavaraka: I'll be boss over the slaves.

Sansthanaka: But first, you'll have to do as I say.

Sthavaraka: Say it, and it shall be done.

Sansthanaka: It's a small thing, a very small thing.

Sthavaraka: Say it.

Sansthanaka: Kill Vasantasenā.

Sthavaraka: No, sir! Please, sir! I didn't mean anything. I only brought her here. She got into the wrong carriage, sir.

Sansthanaka: Why, you're my slave, aren't you? What are you afraid of?

Sthavaraka: Of the future, sir.

Sansthanaka: What is this future? Bah!

Sthavaraka: It brings good and bad.

Sansthanaka: What good, damn you?

Sthavaraka: Well, sir, if I'm a good man now, later I'll be rich and powerful like you.

Sansthanaka: And what bad, damn you?

Sthavaraka: Sir, if I do evil, I'll remain as I am, a slave. I won't do evil, sir.

Sansthanaka: You mean you won't kill her? *He knocks him down.*

Sthavaraka: Beat me. Kill me. But I won't do evil. I was born a slave, I'll die a slave. But I don't want to be born a slave again.

Vasantasenā: I throw myself on your mercy. Let him alone.

Courtier: He's had enough: let him go. That was brave of you, Sthavaraka!

Sansthanaka (*aside*): The first is a fool: he's afraid of his conscience. The second is a bigger fool: he's afraid of the future. But I'm afraid of nothing, for I am the king's brother-in-law. *To* Sthavaraka. Very well, you may go. Go, and never show your face to me again.

Sthavaraka: Yes, sir. *To* Vasantasenā. I had no hand in this, lady. *He leaves.*

Sansthanaka: Get ready to die, Vasantasenā. *He starts to seize her.*

Courtier (*catching him roughly by the neck*): Not while I'm here.

Sansthanaka (*falling backward*): You would kill me? Me, your lord? *He loses consciousness, but quickly recovers.* So, the dog turns against his master? *Rising speaking aside.* I have a trick to take care of you, my friend. I have seen signs you've been making. First you shall go; then we'll attend to her. *Aloud.* How could you suspect me? I who come from the noblest family in the kingdom. I just wanted to frighten her into saying yes.

Courtier: A noble family does not always produce noble characters. Weeds as well as flowers grow in fertile soil.

Sansthanaka: Look, why don't you leave us alone? She can't make up her mind so long as you stay here. I am sure Sthavaraka has taken to his heels. Catch him and bring him back. In the meantime, this proud lady will say yes to me.

Courtier (*aside*): Perhaps he'll come to his senses when she pleads with him in private. *Aloud.* All right, I'll go.

Vasantasenā (*clutching at his garments*): Please don't leave me with him. Please! You gave me your word.

Courtier: It's all right. Vasantasenā. *To Sansthanaka.* It is as a pledge that I leave her in your hands, and I will come back for her.

Sansthanaka: Very good—as long as you leave her in my hands.

Courtier: I want your word of honour.

Sansthanaka: You have my word.

Courtier (*aside*): He might trick me. I know him well. I'll hide myself here for a minute and see what he does. *He hides.*

Sansthanaka (*aside*): Now to kill her. No, wait! Who knows, that foxy Brahmin may have slipped in somewhere to see what I do. But he won't catch me. *He picks flowers and adorns himself, then addresses* Vasantasenā. Vasantasenā, my dearest, sweet of my heart, come to me!

Courtier (*aside*): I see that he just wants to make love to her, as he said. Fine. *He leaves.*

Sansthanaka: You'll have gold, sweet words, my head, my turban at your feet. Love me, my dearest. Take me to your heart.

Vasantasenā: Gold? Take it away! Do the bees leave the lotus because it grows in filthy ponds? I am in love with a good man. His love has given me honour. Shall I leave the mango tree and love a withered thornbush?

Sansthanaka: Chārudatta a mango tree? And I just a thornbush, not even a hedge creeper? Is this how you revile me and praise Chārudatta?

Vasantasenā: What can I do? He lives in my heart. I must praise him.

Sansthanaka: I'll show you! I'll cut him apart, and you too. You filthy mistress of Chārudatta!

Vasantasenā: Say his name again: it's like a song in my ears.

Sansthanaka: Call him! Call his name! See if he saves you now.

Vasantasenā: He would help me, if only he knew.

Sansthanaka: Help you? What is he? The monkey god? The chief of gods? The god of wind? The god of rain? A vulture? A demon? Let him be all these, and he cannot help you now. You are going to die, as Sita died, as Draupadi died. *He lifts his arm to strike her.*

Vasantasenā: Help me, Mother! Help me, Chārudatta! Die? I shall scream! No, why should Vasantasenā be afraid? Chārudatta, I died loving you. God bless you.

Sansthanaka: That bastard's name again! *He strangles her.* Say his name again, say his name again!

Vasantasenā (*very faintly*): God bless you, Chārudatta.

Sansthanaka: And you, Vasantasenā, die, Vasantasenā. *She collapses to the ground.* That's done. This dish of vice, this foul lump of no, no, no, she is dead. *He laughs.* She has met, not Chārudatta, but Death. A lovely way she died. I did nothing: she just fell

like a wet rag. I must hide her: the fox will be back soon. Bah! She should have struggled; I did nothing, really, I'll drag the body into this corner. *He does so.* And hide myself.

The Courtier and Sthavaraka *enter.*

Courtier: I've persuaded Sthavaraka to return. Where's Sansthanaka?

Sansthanaka (*showing himself*): Here. And how are you, Sthavaraka, how are you?

Courtier: Where is she?

Sansthanaka: Who?

Courtier: Vasantasenā.

Sansthanaka: The bird has flown.

Courtier: Where?

Sansthanaka: I think she followed you.

Courtier (*surprised*): No, she didn't.

Sansthanaka: No? Which way did you go?

Courtier: East.

Sansthanaka: Ah, that's it. She went that way, south.

Courtier: I turned south, too.

Sansthanaka: Then she must have gone north.

Courtier: What rot! Tell me the truth.

Sansthanaka: If you must know.... well, I killed her.

Courtier (*desperately*): You what?

Sansthanaka: I killed her. I, Sansthanaka, say so. There's the body. *He points to the body. The* Courtier *swoons*. What? You too? Out?

Sthavaraka: Sir! Sir! It's my fault: I brought her here.

Courtier (*recovering*): Vasantasenā! All is over. *Aside*. He'll want to load this crime on me; I must get away from here, fast. *He starts moving away, but* Sansthanaka *catches hold of him*. Take your filthy hands off me! I'm leaving for good this time.

Sansthanaka: A pretty hope, my friend. First you kill Vasantasenā, then you say I killed her, then you scoot off. And I'm left to face the music.

Courtier: You swine!

Sansthanaka: Come, let's be sensible. I'll give you a hundred gold coins, money, clothes, anything you want. No one need know.

Courtier: The guilt is on your head, you swine. It shall stay on your head. Sansthanaka *starts*

laughing hysterically. From today on, let there be hate between us. May all friendship, all courtesy, be damned.

Sansthanaka: Easy, easy, man. Let's go have a bath in the pool.

Courtier: How could I have been so blind? Wherever I go now, women will glance at me through half-closed eyes, saying: "He's the friend of the killer." Vasantasenā, when you are born again, choose a good and virtuous house. Never be a courtesan again.

Sansthanaka: You aren't giving me the slip! No, sir! You killed Vasantasenā and you'll have to answer for it in the court of the king. *He seizes the* Courtier.

Courtier: I warn you: take your hands off me! *He draws his sword.*

Sansthanaka (*recoiling in fear*): Oh, you are afraid, are you? Run off, then, I'll let you go.

Courtier: This is no place for me. I'll join Sharvilaka, Chārudatta and the others. *He leaves.*

Sansthanaka: Go to hell. And you, Sthavaraka, what do you think of this little business of mine?

Sthavaraka: Sir, it's a terrible sin.

Sansthanaka: Sin? What sin? Let's put it this way. *He takes off his ornaments*. Take these: they're yours. When I want them, I'll take them. In the meantime, they're yours.

Sthavaraka: They look nice on you. sir. What shall I do with them?

Sansthanaka: Take them because I give them to you. Drive these oxen to the palace. And wait for me there.

Sthavaraka: Yes, sir.

Sansthanaka: My friend ran off to save his own skin. As for this foolish servant, I'll clap him into jail the moment I get to the palace. So the secret's safe. No, I must be sure. Is she dead? Or must I kill her again? *He looks at* Vasantasenā's *body.* Stone-dead. This mantle should cover her. No, it has my name on it. These dry leaves are better: they'll hide her. *He scoops leaves over her*. Now to the court, where I'll file a charge against Chārudatta for the murder of Vasantasenā. Let's say he lured her into the Pushpakaranda flower garden and killed her for her money. That sounds good. Trapping Chārudatta is the next step. But I must go about it cleverly. Too many puritans in this city; even the killing of a cow pinches their conscience. *He starts to leave, but suddenly halts*. Damn! Here's that fool monk again, with his yellow

robe, coming my way. He won't forget the nose I slit once—and how I whipped him around. He hates me, and if he sees me and the body he'll run about saying I killed her. *He looks around.* Over the wall for me! Run, fly, like the monkey to Lanka—off I go, off I fly! *He scales the wall and disappears.*

The Buddhist Monk (*the ex-masseur*) *enters.*

Monk: My robe is rinsed. Shall I hang it to dry on this branch? No, too many monkeys here. And the ground's much too dusty. *He looks around.* This should do: a heap of dry leaves blown up here by the wind. *He spreads the wet robe over the leaves, chanting to himself.*

Kill the five senses,
Knock out the ego, cast off ignorance.
Make the flesh pure,
And heaven in yours.
For all things pass. Only virtue remains.

Heaven is mine, but not until I have thanked Vasantasenā. She put me on the right path by paying those ten gold pieces to the chief gambler. I am her slave forever. What's that? A sigh among the leaves? Maybe the heat and the wet robe are making the leaves curl up and crackle.

Vasantasenā (*recovering consciousness, slowly stretches out a hand*).

A hand from among the leaves! A woman's hand, with lovely pearl rings. Another hand! *He*

examines it carefully. I know this hand. Of course. It's the hand that saved me. Let's look. *He throws the wet robe aside and recognises* Vasantasenā. Vasantasenā! Disciple of the Lord Buddha!

Vasantasenā *gasps for water.*

She needs water; but the pool's far away. I'll wring this wet robe over her. *He does so, passing the robe over her face and person.*

Vasantasenā (*reviving*): Who are you, sir?

Monk: Don't you remember? You paid ten gold pieces to buy me my freedom.

Vasantasenā: I remember you. I can't remember anything else. Oh, I could die. I have suffered.

Monk: What happened, good lady?

Vasantasenā: I deserved it.

Monk: Try to get up. Hold onto this creeper and pull yourself up. *He bends down the creeper; she grasps it and pulls herself to her feet.* There is a hermitage nearby where a holy sister lives. She'll nurse you till you are well. No, slowly, walk slowly. *He moves ahead.* This way, good lady, this way. *He leads her off.*

CURTAIN

ACT IX

A Court of Justice. A Clerk *enters.*

Clerk: What a job to arrange the seats! Well, I'll get it done. *He sweeps and tidies the courtroom, giving it finishing touches.* There, that's done. Now to report to the judge. *He stops.* Oh, here's that rascal, the king's brother-in-law, dashing in. I'll stand in a corner: I don't want to meet him. *He stands to one side.*

Sansthanaka, *magnificently dressed, hurries in.*

Sansthanaka: I've had a real bath, in cool, cool water. And a rest under shady trees in the company of soft lovely girls—angels, everyone of them. They played with my hair—such soft fingers!—now a curl, now a knot, now a twist, now a braid. Oh, I'm a perfect gentleman. But there's a fear inside me, an empty nerve where the worm burrows. *He reflects.* But that's soon taken care of; Chārudatta shall be the scapegoat. He's poor, so they'll swallow it when I say he murdered her by strangling. Well, here's the courtroom. The seats are ready. His Honour should be here any minute. I'll wait.

The Judge *enters, followed by* a Warder, *a* Recorder, *and others.*

Recorder: Your Honour?

Judge: Note this down. The most difficult part of a trial is to discover the motives of those involved in it. Crimes are alleged that no one saw, and people work themselves up to such fantastic frenzies that they will continue to stick to allegations that are proved manifestly false by due process of law. Their supporters stick to falsehood, while their enemies broadcast the matter till the king himself is gradually implicated in one way or another. A judge is the worst sufferer; no one has a good word for him. This is natural, for he must be learned, sagacious, eloquent, impartial, and cool-headed; he must reserve judgement until all the evidence is presented and sifted; nothing may corrupt him; he must protect the innocent and punish the guilty, and be in all things honest and truth-loving. And he has to do all this without incurring the displeasure of the king.

Warden: Your Honour has no defect, as the moon has none.

Judge: Clerk, lead the petitioners into the courtroom.

Clerk: Yes, Your Honour. *He goes out and shouts.* The court is in session. All those who wish to present their cases should please come stand before the judge. *He re-enters.*

Sansthanaka (*stepping forward*): I demand justice; I have a case. Note also that I'm a famous man, I come of a noble family; I am the king's own brother-in-law.

Clerk: The king's brother-in-law. Please wait a minute, sir; I'll inform the judge. *He approaches the judge.* Your Honour, the king's brother-in-law has come with a case.

Judge: When important men come with complaints, noble men are ruined. I am afraid the court is very busy today. Tell him, clerk, that the court will admit his case any other day.

The Clerk *goes to* Sansthanaka.

Clerk: Sir, the judge says the court is very busy today; the court will admit your case any other day.

Sansthanaka (*angrily*): Is that so? And why not today? Tell the court that, if my case is not heard today, I'll go to the king, who is my sister's husband (and hence my brother-in-law). And tell the court that I shall go to my

sister and my mother; and I'll bloody well have the judge dismissed and another put in his place—if my case is not heard today.

Clerk (*returning to the* Judge): Your Honour, the king's brother-in-law says: *He repeats* Sansthanaka's *words.*

Judge: He is a fool; but he has all the connections. Well, bring him before us; we'll hear him today.

Clerk (*going to* Sansthanaka): Please come before the court, sir. Your case will be heard today.

Sansthanaka: It will, ha? And a minute ago it wasn't going to be, ha? Frightened pack of fools! They'll dance to my tune all right. *He steps up to the* Judge. I am very happy to see you, Judge. I hope you are happy to see me, for I have the power to make people sad or happy as I like.

Judge (*aside*): Just the language of an honest complainant! *To* Sansthanaka. You may be seated.

Sansthanaka: You bet I will. This place belongs to me, and I'll sit where I like and when I like. *To the* Recorder. Here? *To the* Clerk. You think this is better? Well, let's try this. *He puts his hand on the seated* Judge's *head to steady himself and sits on the floor.*

Judge: You wish to present a case?

Sansthanaka: You bet I do.

Judge: The court is ready to hear it.

Sansthanaka: But first let me remind you that I come of a noble family. My father is the king's father-in-law. The king is my father's son-in-law. I am the king's brother-in-law. And the king happens to be my sister's husband.

Judge: The court is aware of these facts. But we are here to listen to your case and judge it impartially, not to hear of your family connections. Proceed with your complaint.

Sansthanaka: All in good time, all in good time. There's no hurry: *I*'m not guilty. Well, you see, my sister's husband, that is, my brother-in-law, presented me with the garden they call Pushpakaranda, because he is fond of me. Now it just happens that it is a habit of mine to go there daily to see that it is watered and weeded and the pretty flowers kept flowering. And this morning, when I went there, I saw—I couldn't believe my eyes!—the body of a woman on the ground.

Judge: Do you know her?

Sansthanaka: Know her? Who doesn't know her? The pride of Ujjain, a pearl above price. It

was Vasantasenā, the courtesan. Some swinish fellow must have lured her into the garden and strangled her—for her jewels. I didn't—*He stops abruptly, putting his hand over his mouth.*

Judge: The police of our city are very careless. Recorder, make a note of that: the complainant said, "*I* didn't."

Recorder: Yes, Your Honour.

Sansthanaka (*aside*): Damn! I've given the show away. Well, we'll see. *Aloud*. What's all the fuss about, dear judge? I was only saying "I didn't... see it happen." *He wipes out the record on the wax tablet with his foot.*

Judge: How can you tell that she was strangled, and that it was for her jewells?

Sansthanaka: I'm not a fool; her neck was exposed and swollen, and there were no ornaments left on the body.

Clerk: We can believe that.

Sansthanaka (*aside*): I've convinced them. Good!

Clerk: What next is necessary, Your Honour, in the conduct of this case?

Judge: Two factors are to be considered: the allegations on the one hand, and the evidence on the other. The plaintiff and the defendant

are concerned with the investigation of the allegations. It is my business to sift the evidence and come to a conclusion.

Clerk: Then the presence of Vasantasenā's mother is essential to the conduct of the case.

Judge: Precisely. Clerk, see that Vasantasenā's mother is brought here; but do not upset her unduly.

Clerk: Yes, Your Honour. *He goes out and returns almost immediately* with Vasantasenā's *mother*. This way, please.

Mother: My daughter went to a friend's house. Now suddenly this news, and no sooner do I reach the courthouse than I am summoned into the court. I don't like any of this; I feel faint. Sir, where do I go?

Clerk: Come this way, please. *He leads her to the* Judge.

Mother: My blessings on you, good sirs.

Judge: You are very welcome. Please sit down.

Mother: Thank you. *She sits down.*

Sansthanaka: Ah, you mother of a common slut, so you are here!

Judge: Ignore him. You are the mother of Vasantasenā?

Mother: Yes, sir.

Judge: Do you know where Vasantasenā is now?

Mother: I thought she was at a friend's house.

Judge: Could you tell the court his name?

Mother (*aside*): This is so embarrassing. *Aloud*, Must I answer that question, sir?

Judge: I am sorry, but the court asks it, so you must answer it.

Clerk: You should answer it; it has to do with the conduct of the case.

Mother: Well, in that case, my daughter went to the house of a very proper man—the son of the noble Sagaradatta, the grandson of the merchant Vinayadatta. His name is Chārudatta. He lives in the merchants' quarter. She went to see him.

Sansthanaka: That's him! Chārudatta! I accuse him of the murder.

Clerk: He might be her friend, but that doesn't make him a murderer.

Judge: In that case, the court must have the evidence of Chārudatta.

Clerk: Yes, Your Honour.

Judge: Recorder put this down: "Vasantasenā went to meet Chārudatta at his residence." His

presence is therefore required. Couldn't we do without him? No, I'm afraid not. Clerk, bring him here; say that the court summons him. See that you do not inconvenience him in any way; just say, "The judge would like to see you."

Clerk: Yes, Your Honour. *He goes out, and returns quickly with* Chārudatta. This way, sir.

Chārudatta (*aside*): The king knows me well, yet I am summoned into the court. Perhaps his spies have told him that it was in my carriage that Āryaka escaped; perhaps he thinks I am in the conspiracy.

Clerk: This way, sir.

Chārudatta (*aside*): I thought I heard a raven croak; that was a bad omen. And now my right eye is twitching ominously. I thought I saw the bird in a tree, fixing his baleful eyes on me. I saw a black snake on the road in front of me, his tongue flickering, fangs showing and eyes hating me. And now my left arm throbs again. All these things point to a terrible death. Give me courage, God, to endure what is coming.

Clerk: Across the courtroom, sir. Follow me.

Chārudatta (*aside*): A vast and sucking ocean, with the advisers lost fathoms below, deep

in thought. The tossing waves are quarreling lawyers. The king's spies are sharks and crocodiles. The executioners are monstrous sea snakes. The scribes are slimy sea birds. Oh, how horrible. *He bumps against a pillar.* There goes my arm again, throbbing. And my eye twitches again. *He arrives in front of the* Judge.

Judge (*aside*): Here is Chārudatta. Could a face like that—candid-eyed, with that honest nose—could that face hide guilt?

Chārudatta: My greetings to the court, and to you, Your Honour.

Judge (*disturbed*): You are welcome, sir. Clerk, see that he has a comfortable seat.

Clerk (*bringing a small seat*): Sir.

Chārudatta *sits down.*

Sansthanaka: You are here, I see, my fine strangler of women! Bah, call this a trial, where seats are given to women-killers? *He sneers.* Go ahead; you have the power.

Judge: Could you tell the court, Chārudatta, if at any time there was attachment, affection or friendship of any kind between you and the daughter of this lady?

Chārudatta: Which lady?

Judge: This lady. *He indicates* Vasantasenā's *mother.*

Chārudatta (*rising*): My most respectful greetings.

Mother: May you live long, my son. *Aside*, So this is Chārudatta. My daughter was a lucky girl.

Judge: Chārudatta, how long have you known Vasantasenā?

Chārudatta *is unable to conceal his embarrassment.*

Sansthanaka: He's shamming, you can see; it's a guilty mind that does that. He strangled her, and he stole her jewels, and I shall prove it.

Clerk: Speak up, Chārudatta. The court asks you a question. You need not be afraid.

Chārudatta (*confusedly*): What can I say? How can I confess that a courtesan was my friend? All I can say is that my youth, not my character, was to blame.

Judge: I must ask you to be truthful. This is a court, and nothing must be hidden, however personal it is. There is a charge against you.

Chārudatta: Who has accused me?

Sansthanaka: I have.

Chārudatta: It must be a gruesome charge then.

Sansthanaka: Why, you woman-strangler, you kill a fine woman like Vasantasenā for the sake of stealing her jewels, and now you try to cover it up by pretty lies!

Chārudatta: You must be mad.

Judge: Ignore him, Chārudatta. Answer the question: was she your friend?

Chārudatta: Yes.

Judge: And can you tell us where she is now?

Chārudatta: I know only that she left my house.

Clerk: Where did she go? Did anyone go with her?

Chārudatta (*aside*): Shall I tell them that she went alone to meet me?

Clerk: Speak, sir.

Chārudatta: She left my home. That's all I know for certain.

Sansthanaka: Is that all? What about the way you lured her into my garden of Pushpakaranda, strangled her, and pinched her jewels? What about that?

Chārudatta: You are a liar. You must be crazy.

Judge (*aside*): You can weigh the Himalayas, catch the wind, and bridge the ocean, but you can't easily prove Chārudatta guilty. *Aloud*. I'm afraid I do not see his guilt.

Sansthanaka: We don't want opinions; carry on with the case.

Judge (*losing his temper*): You utter fool! If you try to explain the Vedas, won't your tongue be cut out? If you look into the sun, won't it blind you? If you thrust your hand into fire, won't it get burned? And if you come with impossible charges against a noble man like Chārudatta, won't the earth open up and swallow you? Whatever made you think that Chārudatta strangled her? He gave away his whole wealth in charities, and do you think he would steal Vasantasenā's jewels—and murder her on that account?

Sansthanaka: I repeat: it is not your business to speak in his defense. I want a fair trial.

Mother: It is false, the whole charge is false! I know she left a gold box in his care, and when a thief stole it he replaced it with a much more valuable necklace. How could such a man kill her for her jewels? Never! Oh, my daughter, my child, if only you were here! *She weeps.*

Judge: Could you tell us, Chārudatta, if she left on foot or in a carriage?

Chārudatta: I did not see her leave. I cannot say.

Viraka *dashes in.*

Viraka: I'll go to court. I warned him! He abused me, he kicked me— *me*, a captain! For doing my duty, as was proper. Sirs, I greet you respectfully.

Judge: Ah, Viraka, a captain of the guard. What brings you here, Viraka?

Viraka: It's a long story, Your Honour. I was only doing my duty, as is proper, searching for Āryaka, who had broken out of jail. Well, Your Honour, I didn't like the looks of a carriage, so I stopped it. Chandanaka—he's the other captain—peeped in and told it to go on. "You've had a look," I said, "but now I'm going to search it properly." And then Chandanaka, Your Honour, stopped me, abused me, and *kicked* me! And I was just doing my duty, as is proper, Your Honour. That's all, Your Honour. I ask for justice.

Judge: Do you know who the owner of the carriage is?

Viraka: The driver said it was this gentleman here, Your Honour— Chārudatta—and that

Vasantasenā was in it, going to meet him in the Pushpakaranda flower garden.

Sansthanaka: Didn't I say so?

Judge: A bad day for Chārudatta. We shall look into your complaint later, Viraka. In the meantime, take one of the messenger's horses at the gate, go to Pushpakaranda and see if there is a dead woman's body in the garden. Report back here immediately.

Viraka: Yes, Your Honour. *He goes out and quickly returns.* There is a woman's body in the garden. The animals had been at it.

Clerk: Are you sure it was a woman's body?

Viraka: Yes, to judge from the long hair and the size of the hands and feet.

Judge: The more we investigate, the greater is my confusion. The law wants a straight case; but the heart refuses to admit plain facts.

Chārudatta: Like bees round an unfolding flower, so sorrows cluster round a poor man.

Judge: Chārudatta, you must tell the court the whole truth, whatever you know.

Chārudatta: This is the truth. You all know me well. I—whom it hurts to pluck a creeper's flowers—how could *I* seize her by her bee-

black hair and strangle her? But no one believes me. This too is the truth. A passiontorn man, half-crazed with hatred, plants a crime on another, whom he envies. But he is believed.

Sansthanaka: What nonsense is this! Why should this killer remain seated? This isn't law. Whom are you hoodwinking?

Judge: Clerk, take his seat away.

The Clerk *removes* Chārudatta's *seat*.

Chārudatta: I shall obey. Your Honour, but I am innocent. *He squats on the floor*.

Sansthanaka (*aside*): Ha-ha! My sin is now on his head. I'll sit near him. He *edges closer to* Chārudatta. Come, Chārudatta, be a sport about it. Look at me. Say, "I killed Vasantasenā."

Chārudatta: You are foul and mean. Don't come near me. What will Maitreya think? What will my wife think, good noble woman? My son? Poor child, what does he know of his father's shame, busy as he is with his endless games? *Aside*. Why is Maitreya taking so long? I sent him to Vasantasenā's house to return the jewels she gave Rohasena to buy a gold toy cart. He's very late.

Maitreya *enters with the jewels in his girdle.*

Maitreya (*aside*): Though Chārudatta asked me to return these to her, saying, "It was good of you to give them to my son, but it would not be proper on my part to accept them," Rebhila met me on my way and told me that Chārudatta had been summoned into the court. So I didn't go to Vasantasenā's, but hurried here. *He comes forward.* I humbly greet the court. Where is my friend?

Judge: Chārudatta? There.

Maitreya: My friend Chārudatta, may happiness—

Chārudatta: Happiness later, sorrow now.

Maitreya: Be patient.

Chārudatta: I am.

Maitreya: You look terribly worried. Why were you summoned?

Chārudatta: It seems I am a murderer... no hope for me... woman's love.... Instead, I killed her... they'll tell you the rest.

Maitreya: What!

Chārudatta (*whispering in his ear*): That's the story.

Maitreya: Who says so?

Chārudatta (*indicating* Sansthanaka): He is the man chosen by fate to accuse me.

Maitreya (*aside to* Chārudatta): Why not tell them that we did not wait for her and she must have gone home alone.

Chārudatta: No one believes me. I am a poor man, you see.

Maitreya: Gentlemen, what is this! The flower of Ujjain's manhood—a man who gave all his money to decorate this city with gardens, temples, wells, and fountains—would he kill a woman for a few measly jewels? *He speaks more and more angrily.* And you, you bastard, Sansthanaka, you king's brother-in-law, you stuffed monkey, you foul lying dunghill, you quadruple idiot, say it! Say it in front of *me*! Say that this man who never plucked a flower in his life for fear of hurting it, committed a bawdy stinking murder! You bloody bastard, say it and I'll crack your skull wide open with this crooked stick, you damned crooked villain!

Sansthanaka: Listen to that, gentlemen! I have accused Chārudatta. My business is with Chārudatta. And this swine, whom I've hardly met, wants to crack my skull. Go ahead, try it! Accursed swine!

Maitreya (*lifts his stick*): Sansthanaka *jumps up and hits him first. A scuffle ensues, and the jewels slip out of* Maitreya's *girdle.* Sansthanaka *picks them up and displays them triumphantly.*

Sansthanaka: Look, gentlemen, look! The woman's jewels! The reason he strangled her.

The Judge *and others favouring* Chārudatta *hang their heads.*

Chārudatta (*aside to* Maitreya): My fate plays terrible tricks on me. With the falling jewels, I fall too.

Maitreya: Why don't you tell them the whole truth and be done with it?

Chārudatta: I have, but the truth does not satisfy the court.

Clerk (*to* Vasantasenā's *mother*): Could you tell us, madam, if this gold box is your daughter's?

Mother (*examining it*): It looks the same, but it's a different box.

Sansthanaka: You old slut, you know it's the same. Why do you say it's not?

Mother: Shut up!

Clerk: Please be careful now: is it the same box or not?

Mother: It is an excellent imitation. But it is not my daughter's box.

Judge: And can you identify these jewels?

Mother: I have already said that they are excellent imitations, but these are not my daughter's jewells. Perhaps the same jeweler made them.

Judge: Examine them, clerk. It's true that jewellers are expert at duplicating ornaments.

Clerk: Are these jewels your property, Chārudatta?

Chārudatta: No.

Clerk: Whose are they?

Chārudatta: They belong to the daughter of this lady.

Clerk: How did she lose them?

Chārudatta: It is true she lost them once.

Clerk: Speak the truth, Chārudatta. The truth can bring you no harm. To hide truth is to lie.

Chārudatta: I cannot say how she lost them. I know they were taken from my house.

Sansthanaka: Liar! You lured her into the garden, killed her, and stole them. Don't give us your pretty mishmash.

Judge: Chārudatta, speak the truth. Do not compel the court to sentence you to flogging.

Chārudatta: I am innocent. If others suspect me for no reason, I am prepared to suffer for it. *Aside.* What else is there in life but suffering, now that Vasantasenā is dead? *Aloud.* I am called a murderer. Let him—*He points to* Sansthanaka.—call me what he will.

Sansthanaka: Why don't you admit it, you fool? Say, "I killed her."

Chārudatta: You have said it.

Sansthanaka: There! There! He confessed! He says he killed her! Sentence him!

Judge: The court has no other alternative. Clerk, arrest Chārudatta.

At the Clerk's *gesture, guards move to each side of* Chārudatta.

Mother: Listen to me, sirs; gentlemen, kind sirs, be merciful. My daughter is dead, killed. Let him live. She was *my* daughter—yet *I* do not accuse Chārudatta. Why should he be punished? Set him free.

Sansthanaka: Get out, you witch! This is none of your business now.

Mother: My son, my dear son. *She goes out, weeping.*

Sansthanaka (*aside*): A tidy bit of work I've done today. *He also leaves.*

Judge: Chārudatta, our task is to sift the evidence. The king will pronounce sentence. Clerk, remind King Palaka that the culprit is a Brahmin, hence he cannot be sentenced to death; that the law lays down his maximum sentence as banishment from the kingdom with his wealth handed to him intact.

Clerk: Yes, Your Honour. *He goes out, and soon returns in tears.* I went to King Palaka, and His Majesty declares: "Since he killed Vasantasenā for such a trifle, let the same jewels be hung from his neck, let him be led to the southern burial ground and there let him be executed. This punishment is a warning to all others who contemplate murder."

Chārudatta: A treacherous violation of the law. He has bad counsellors, our king. But he shall reap the whirlwind of them if he is not careful. Evil ministers can kill thousands, and keep on doing so. It doesn't matter now. Maitreya, see that my wife is well cared for after I die. And look after my son, Rohasena, as if he were your own.

Maitreya: How can I? When the root is cut, how can the tree survive?

Chārudatta: No, that is not true. When a man dies, he lives on in his son. Look after my son; give him the friendship you gave me.

Maitreya: I will try. You have been the best friend I ever had.

Chārudatta: Bring Rohasena to me. I want to see my son before I go.

Maitreya *hurries out.*

Judge: Clerk, take the prisoner away. Let the executioners receive their orders.

The court leaves.

Chārudatta (*as he goes*): What will Maitreya think? What will my wife think, good noble woman? My son? Poor child—his little games are endless. Test me by fire, by poison, on the rack—and if I fail the test, I will go smiling to my doom. But to trust a scoundrel's word above mine! Such a king! A Brahmin's curse on you! Your sons, and your sons' sons—may hell receive them! I am ready.

He is marched out.

CURTAIN

ACT X

A street. Chārudatta *enters, flanked by two executioners.*

First executioner: Don't worry, sir. It only takes a second. We'll have your head off in a jiffy. We're pretty good at it. Hey, make way, you!—this is the noble Chārudatta, going to have his head chopped off.

Chārudatta (*sadly*): That raven again; I heard him. Red oleanders on my head, flowers of death. What a ghastly sacrifice!

Second executioner: What's the big idea, there? Move on, move on! It isn't a pretty sight. He was a good tree once: that's what some birds tell me. But now it's the ax for him.

Chārudatta: Who can escape fate? A Brahmin dragged like a beast to the sacrifice!

First executioner: Here we are. Beat the drum and I'll announce the sentence. Gentlemen of the city, most worthy citizens! The king is pleased to proclaim that Chārudatta, son of Sagaradatta, and grandson of the merchant Vinayadatta, having seduced the courtesan Vasantasenā into the lonely Pushpakaranda

flower garden, and there having strangled her and robbed her of her jewels, and having confessed his guilt in a court of law, is hereby sentenced to be executed. Let this serve as a warning to all others who contemplate crimes heinous both to this world and the next, for King Palaka will punish them in a similar manner.

Chārudatta (*aside*): As a Brahmin, performer of a hundred holy sacrifices, my name grew in prestige. Now it is spoken with shame, blackened in the black spots of our city by louts and loafers. *He looks up and puts his fingers in his ears.* Oh, Vasantasenā! I who fed on the sweetness of your ruby-red lips, your teeth white as moons! I, with heaven in my heart—that I should live to pass through such filthy shame!

First executioner: Come, sir, let's move on.

Chārudatta: I had friends once. Where are they now? Hiding in their cloaks. An enemy will smile at you when you lose—but a friend!

First executioner: The street is cleared. Let's go.

Voice (*calling offstage*): Father! Father!

Chārudatta: One favour I must ask you...

First executioner: A favour from *us*? But we are low-caste.

Chārudatta: But not so cruel as the king. Let me be happy once before I die; let me see my son's face.

First executioner: Let him come.

Maitreya *and* Rohasena *enter.*

Rohasena: Father!

Maitreya: My friend.

Chārudatta: My son. Maitreya. *He looks tenderly at his son.* What can I give you, my child? *He takes off his sacred thread.* Take this. No pearls and no gold. But it is sacred. *He gives the thread to* Rohasena.

First executioner: Come, Chārudatta.

Rohasena: Where are you taking my father?

First executioner: We have orders from the king.

Rohasena: Take me; let my father go.

First executioner: Why, what a brave boy!

Maitreya: Why don't you set my friend free? Take me in his place.

Chārudatta (*to each*): No. No.

First executioner: Out of the way, gentlemen, out of the way! Let's announce the sentence again here. *He does so.*

Sthavaraka (*from a high window in the palace jail overlooking the square, hears the announcement and cries out*): Chārudatta sentenced to death? And me thrown in jail! Sirs, sirs, listen to me! I am the man who took Vasantasenā to the Pushpakaranda flower garden; she entered my carriage by mistake. I swear it. There my lord Sansthanaka strangled her with his bare hands because she refused to love him. Listen! Can't you hear me? No, they're too far away. My voice doesn't reach them. Shall I jump down? That might save Chārudatta. This window is so high that it's not barred; I can slip out of it. But shall I die? Oh, then let me die, let Chārudatta live—that's all I want. Heaven is mine if I die so nobly. *He makes the leap.* Not hurt! And the jump snapped my ankle chains. Oh, where are you? Where are you! It's me, Sthavaraka! *He sees the executioners coming.* Stop! Listen to me! It's important. It was I who took Vasantasenā to Pushpakaranda, where Sansthanaka strangled her because she refused to love him, and—

Chārudatta: Thank God, I am saved.

First executioner: Is all that true?

Sthavaraka: Of course it is. And Sansthanaka threw me in jail and put me in chains, so that no one would know.

Sansthanaka *emerges from a palace gate into the square.*

Sansthanaka (*chuckling*): What a dinner I've had—meat, fish, sauce, and vegetables. Hm, I hear voices.... The drums and kettledrums that announce an execution. It's that swine Chārudatta—what fun to watch an enemy's head chopped off! I must see the execution. They tell me that if a man watches his enemy die he gets better eyesight in his next birth. I'll climb to the first window in this palace tower. *He reappears at a window.* Oh, what a crowd to watch the fun! But when *I* die, I'll draw even bigger crowds. I'm a great man, the brother-in-law of the king. Well, there he is, dressed up like a prize cow. But why have they stopped so near the palace jail? And what is that rascal Sthavaraka doing there! Has he broken out of jail? Has he spilled the beans? This is getting serious! I must go down and see for myself. *He emerges from the bottom of the tower and wades into the crowd.* Make way for a lord!

First executioner: Make room, please, make room.

Sansthanaka: Sthavaraka, you'd better come along with me.

Sthavaraka: No! Leave me alone! Isn't it enough that you strangled Vasantasenā? Why do you want to murder Chārudatta too?

Sansthanaka: What do you mean? I'm as honest as gold. I killed no woman.

Voices from the crowd: He says you killed her. Chārudatta did not kill her.

Sansthanaka: Who says that? Tell me, who says that? *Members of the crowd point out* Sthavaraka.

Voices: *He.* And he's an honest man.

Sansthanaka (*frightened, aside*): The devil! I should have had him better chained. He's a witness to the crime. *Aloud.* A pack of lies, my friends. He's a no-good lout. I caught him redhanded stealing gold and had him put in chains. He's got a grudge against me; oh, yes, he has. He's invented this story. Isn't that so, you rascal? *He edges up to Sthavaraka and slips him a gold bracelet.* Here, take this, and keep your mouth shut.

Sthavaraka (*taking the bracelet and showing it*): Sirs, sirs! He's trying to bribe me with this!

Sansthanaka (*snatching the bracelet from him*): That's it! That's the bracelet I caught him stealing! *To the* Executioners. Look here, you!—I nabbed him redhanded and had him whipped. Look at his back if you don't believe me.

First executioner (*examining the welts*): Yes, sir, that's true; he has been whipped. No wonder he's making up stories.

Sthavaraka: Oh, no one believes a slave. *He speaks sadly.* Chārudatta, I did what I could. *He falls at* Chārudatta's *feet.*

Chārudatta: Rise, Sthavaraka. It's not your fault. My fate is against me.

First executioner: Set him free now, sir. He has been whipped.

Sansthanaka: Run off, you! *He pushes* Sthavaraka *away.* And now what's the delay? Kill him.

First executioner: Kill him yourself, sir, if you think we're too slow.

Rohasena: Kill me; please don't kill my father.

Sansthanaka: Kill both. Kill father, kill son.

Chārudatta: Run off, son, to your mother. Don't waste another minute here. Go with your mother to an ashrama. They will kill you here. Maitreya, go; and take him to safety too.

Maitreya: Do you think I can live without you?

Chārudatta: Your life is your life, Maitreya. You have no right to treat it so lightly.

Maitreya (*aside*): Yes, but I cannot live without you. I'll go and lead the boy to safety; then I'll follow my friend's road to death. *Aloud.* I'll do as you say. *He embraces* Chārudatta *and falls at his feet.*

Rohasena, *crying, also falls at his father's feet.*

Sansthanaka: Haven't I told you to finish father and son off?

First executioner: We have no orders from the king to kill the son. Go away, boy, go away. *They push the child out of sight, and move on a little.* Here's the third station. Beat the drum and announce the sentence.

The sentence is again proclaimed.

Sansthanaka (*aside*): This won't do. No one is listening. *Aloud.* Chārudatta, open your mouth and speak the truth: "I killed Vasantasenā." Chārudatta *is silent.* The swine won't speak. Make him speak! Give him a taste of the cane!

First executioner (*lifting the bamboo cane*): Speak up, Chārudatta.

Chārudatta: I am afraid of nothing any more—save only this—that men should say I killed the thing I loved.

Sansthanaka: Speak up!

Chārudatta: Friends, citizens of Ujjain, my city—

Sansthanaka: Say, "I killed her."

Chārudatta: You have said it.

First executioner: It's your turn today, Ahinta.

Second executioner: No, it's yours, Goha.

First executioner: Let's see.... Ah, yes. Well, let's wait a little. There's no hurry.

Second executioner: Why?

First executioner: Well, my father once said to me, "Goha," he said to me, "you never know. Some kind man might come along and buy his freedom. You never know. A son might be born to the king, and a general pardon proclaimed. An elephant might break loose, and the lucky beggar might escape. You never know. There might even be a new king come to the throne, and all the prisoners set free." That's what he said.

Sansthanaka: A new king? What!

First executioner: That's why I never hurry.

Sansthanaka: Come on, come on, kill him. Finish it off. *He withdraws a little.*

First executioner: Forgive us, noble Chārudatta. We are only carrying out the king's orders.

Is there anything you would like to say before you are executed?

Chārudatta: I hope that whatever sins I have committed will be washed away by the virtue of the lady who is now in heaven.

First executioner (*pointing*): That's the southern burial ground. You can see the jackals and vultures.

Chārudatta (*covering his eyes*): Oh, horrible! *He sits down in sudden fear.*

Sansthanaka: I'll wait till he's killed good and proper. Why is he sitting down?

First executioner: Are you afraid, Chārudatta?

Chārudatta (*standing up quickly again*): Yes, but only of what people will say, not of death.

First executioner: Sir, the moon changes, the sun changes; death is for us all. One man rises to fall; another falls and rises again. But when death comes, he *really* falls, and he throws his body aside, like a useless garment. Sir, that's what wise men say.

Vasantasenā, *very agitated, enters at the other side of the crowd, accompanied by the Buddhist* Monk.

Monk: It does look a little odd—me, a monk, in the company of a courtesan. Lady, where shall I take you?

Vasantasenā: Please, to Chārudatta's house. When I see him, I know I shall live again, as a night lily lives on seeing the moon.

Monk: We'll go by this royal road. Come, follow me. But what are they shouting there?

Vasantasenā: What a great crowd of people! The whole city of Ujjain seems to have turned out here. What does it mean?

First executioner: This is the place for the final announcement. Announce the sentence. *There is a flourish of drums.* It won't be long now, Chārudatta.

Chārudatta: I am ready.

The sentence is again proclaimed.

Monk (*fearfully*): Lady, the noble Chārudatta is going to be executed for murdering *you!*

Vasantasenā (*in terror*): Take me there. Quickly.

Monk: Make room for us, please. Room for us, please.

Vasantasenā: Please, sirs. Please...

They start to push their way through the crowd.

First executioner: Once again, noble Chārudatta, we ask your forgiveness. We are only carrying out orders.

Chārudatta: There is nothing in my heart against you. I only hope that whatever sins I may

have committed will be washed away by the virtue of the lady who is now in heaven.

First executioner (*raising his sword*): Noble Chārudatta, do not move. A single stroke will do it. *As he is about to strike, the sword suddenly drops from his hand.* Why did it fall? I held it tight. O goddess of the Sakya hills, hear me. It is your wish. Chārudatta will escape. And the low-caste race will rise.

Second executioner: We have our orders.

First executioner: Yes. We'll tie him to the stake first.

Vasantasenā *breaks through the crowd.*

Vasantasenā: Stop it! Stop it! I am Vasantasenā. I am not dead. Oh, Chārudatta! Chārudatta, my love! *She falls on his breast.*

Monk (*breaking through the crowd*): Chārudatta, noble sir! *He falls at* Chārudatta *feet.*

First executioner (*worried*): Vasantasenā! And we nearly killed an innocent man!

Monk (*rising*): Chārudatta is alive. Glory to the Buddha!

Vasantasenā: And I too am alive at last.

First executioner: Let's go to the king with the news. He is at the place of sacrifice.

Sansthanaka (*seeing* Vasantasenā): A ghost? No, still alive! I'm ruined. I must run, I must fly! *He runs away.*

First executioner: Our orders were to behead the man who killed Vasantasenā. Let's go after the king's brother-in-law; he must be the man.

Both Executioners *go out.*

Chārudatta: Saved from the jaws of death, from eternal shame. Are you Vasantasenā? Or a goddess from heaven? Am I mad? Are you alive? Am I seeing things dropped from heaven... ? No, someone else...a goddess....

Vasantasenā (*falling at his feet*): I am Vasantasenā, my love, a wretched woman, the cause of all your troubles.

Voices: Vasantasenā is alive! Alive!

Chārudatta (*blindly pulling her to her feet and embracing her with great feeling*): It is true, then. You are Vasantasenā.

Vasantasenā: Unhappy Vasantasenā.

Chārudatta: It is Over.

Vasantasenā: What could you have done, my dearest?

Chārudatta: They said I killed you. Sansthanaka hates me. He wanted to have me killed too.

Vasantasenā (*clapping her hands to her ears*): No!

Chārudatta (*seeing the* Monk): And who is he?

Vasantasenā: A kind monk to whom I owe my life.

Monk: You may not remember me, sir. I was the man you engaged to be your masseur. But when I left you, I fell among gamblers and got into debt; then this good lady bought me my freedom with her jewels. I renounced gambling and became a Buddhist monk. And then many things happened. She got into the wrong carriage by mistake. I found her in the old Pushpakaranda garden, where she had been left for dead by Sansthanaka.

Voices (*shouting offstage*): Āryaka has won! Glory to Āryaka!

Sharvilaka *enters hurriedly.*

Sharvilaka: Yes, I killed Palaka. This hand of mine slew the king, and this hand anointed Āryaka as the new king. Now to free Chārudatta. Make way, you! *He sees* Chārudatta. Chārudatta living? And Vasantasenā! My king will be pleased to hear this. Can I go near him, I who played him false? I will; my honesty is my passport. Noble Chārudatta, greetings!

Chārudatta: Who are you, sir?

Sharvilaka: I am the thief who stole the gold box from your house. I throw myself on your mercy.

Chārudatta (*embracing him*): It has been a blessing in disguise, my friend.

Sharvilaka: And I also bring the news that I killed King Palaka at the place of sacrifice, and that Āryaka is the new king.

Chārudatta: Āryaka!

Sharvilaka: Yes, your carriage saved him, and now he is king.

Chārudatta: And you are the man who helped Āryaka escape from the palace prison?

Sharvilaka: Yes, sir. A small thing, sir.

Chārudatta: I am happy to hear it.

Sharvilaka: His Majesty King Āryaka bestows on you, as a token of gratitude and affection, the Kingdom of Kushavati, on the bank of the Vena, and hopes you will Honour him by accepting it. *He turns.* And now bring in that swine.

Sansthanaka, *his hands tied behind his back, is dragged in.*

Sansthanaka: Well, I'm caught now; bound and dragged like an ass or a dog. But I still have a trick or two about me. *He appeals to* Chārudatta. Noble Chārudatta, help me, help me.

Voices (from the crowd): Don't, Chārudatta. We'll teach the swine. Leave him to us.

Sansthanaka: I am helpless, I am finished, Chārudatta. Help me. Please help me.

Chārudatta: Yes, whoever seeks help shall not go without it.

Sharvilaka: Damn him! Take him away from here. *To* Chārudatta. What shall we do to him, sir? Drag him till his flesh is torn off? Throw him to the dogs? Cut him up with a saw?

Chārudatta: Listen to me.

Sharvilaka: Sir.

Sansthanaka: Chārudatta, help me! Please help me! I promise I won't do it again. I come to you for help.

Voices (from the crowd): Kill him! Kill the swine!

Vasantasenā *takes the oleander garland from* Chārudatta's *neck and throws it around* Sansthanaka's.

Sansthanaka: Please, help me now, good courtesan. Have pity. I promise, I'll never kill you again. Never!

Sharvilaka: Drag him away. Noble Chārudatta, what punishment shall we give him?

Chārudatta: You will do as I say?

Sharvilaka: I promise.

Chārudatta: Thank you. In that case...

Sharvilaka: Kill him. But how?

Chārudatta: No, set him free.

Sharvilaka: What!

Chārudatta: It is said that the sword should never be used on a man who begs for mercy.

Sharvilaka: We won't use the sword; we'll throw him to the dogs.

Chārudatta: No. Let mercy be his punishment.

Sharvilaka: I do not like it, but if you say so.... But what shall I do with him?

Chārudatta: Just untie him; let him go.

Sharvilaka *does so.*

Sansthanaka: Ha-ha! I'm free! Free! *He runs out.*

Sharvilaka: His Majesty has asked me, madam, to confer on you the title of Lady of the Court.

Vasantasenā: Please thank him for me.

Sharvilaka (*placing a veil of honour on* Vasantasenā's *head; then turning to* Chārudatta): Sir, what does the monk desire?

Chārudatta: What do you want, holy sir?

Monk: All things pass. And nothing remains. I want nothing.

Chārudatta: In that case, you shall be the spiritual head of all Buddhist monasteries in the kingdom.

Sharvilaka: That shall be done. Sthavaraka now remains.

Chārudatta: Give him his freedom. Let the executioners become chiefs of their profession. Chandanaka shall be chief of police; as for Sansthanaka....

Sharvilaka: Leave him to me; I know how to deal with him.

Chārudatta: Sansthanaka shall remain as he was. Let him do as he likes.

Sharvilaka: Anything else, noble Chārudatta?

Chārudatta: Āryaka is king; Vasantasenā, whom I love, shall be my second wife. You are my friend now. Our Honour is intact. We have repaid cruelty with kindness. There is nothing else.

CURTAIN

♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦♦

King Śūdraka was one of the best Sanskrit dramatists who was probably born in South India (Andhra Pradesh). The drama itself tells of him as a Brāhmaṇa, who versed in many sciences and as one who died by self-immolation at the age of over a hundred years. He was known to be the author of at least half a dozen Sanskrit works, but nothing definite can be said either about his authorship.

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